

The Hon. Marcia Neave AO
Chair
Royal Commission into Family Violence
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28 May 2015

Dear Commissioner,

We welcome the opportunity to provide this submission into this important inquiry looking at how to stop family violence and to provide effective assistance to the survivors of this violence.

Telstra recognises family violence causes profound personal, social and economic costs for individuals and, communities across the country. While this violence is targeted disproportionately towards women, men and children are also impacted.

It is with a view to sharing Telstra's actions to support the survivors of family violence, and to help prevent family violence, that I put forward this submission. In making this submission, we are responding to the Royal Commission's request for information on how organisations are supporting the prevention of family violence. As a responsible corporate citizen we believe we have a role to play in contributing to the discussion on this important topic, although at the same time we do not claim to have all the answers and we recognise the limits to what one company can do.

It is in this context that we would like to share some of our initiatives with the community, customers and staff.

Community Partnerships – Telstra Safe Connections

Now, more than ever, mobile phones have become an essential part of our daily lives. Being able to safely connect with friends, family and support services is absolutely vital for people in domestic violence situations.

In November 2014, we launched a new program, Telstra Safe Connections, which is designed to help women impacted by domestic violence to stay safely connected.

Telstra delivers the program in partnership with the Women's Services Network (WESNET). We provide up to 5,000 new smart phones a year, each with \$30 pre-paid credit, to WESNET, who distribute them, along with technology safety tips, to approximately 400 member organisations nationally. These organisations work directly with clients impacted by domestic violence.

In the first six months of the program, 2,500 smart phones were distributed nationally to women's refuges, shelters, safe houses and information and referral services.

Importantly, this program provides *new* smart phones and safety information. Safety is a critical consideration here, so having a secure and uncompromised phone and knowing how to protect oneself is essential. The education materials we provide support agencies to help women impacted by domestic violence to understand new communication technologies and how to increase their safety when using them.

For people impacted by domestic violence, a smart phone can become a lifeline to search for and find help, create safety plans and find pathways to a new life.

There can also be risks to manage with mobile phone use in domestic violence and other situations, such as separation. One example is that bills and apps can reveal the location of the phone and user. Telstra is helping to raise awareness about privacy issues for recipients of smartphones under the Safe Connections program by enclosing a sticker with each smartphone distributed. The sticker reminds smartphone recipients of the various ways they may be contacted and to keep these contact details up to date.

Additionally, Telstra publishes a safety tips specifically for the safe connections program. This is shared with our partner, WESNET, so that they can provide advice to smartphone recipients. The safety tips cover a range of areas, including

- Five tips to protect you and your mobile phone;
- Safety tips for replacing your mobile phone;
- Signs you are being monitored;
- How to take action;
- Things you should know; and
- How to get help.

Customer services and engagement

Our customers are at the centre of everything we do. We work closely with community organisations to resolve issues that arise when couples separate and to inform community workers on the options available to assist their clients. We have a dedicated Specialised Assistance Team in billing and credit management available to help customers in financial hardship, which is directly contactable by community workers. We also sit down twice a year with consumer representatives at our **CEO-Consumer Roundtable**, and our **Financial Hardship Forum**, where we listen to concerns and seek to respond in ways that improve the customer experience.

One important service Telstra offers, our online and printed telephone directories, can have consequences for survivors of domestic violence who are seeking to remain anonymous. Under Telstra's carrier licence granted by the Commonwealth, Telstra is legally required to produce a publicly accessible directory (the White Pages). To balance this objective with the desire of some individuals to have their personal details remain private, we offer a silent line option whereby customers can elect not to have their details published either online or in the hard copy directory.

Normally, there is a charge for silent lines of \$2.93 per month (including GST). Since 2013 we have waived this fee for customers who have a valid court or police issued protection order; are clients of a Centrelink social worker or a community or legal aid organisation providing services to people facing a personal safety threat; or are a staff member, volunteer or contractor of a community organisation providing services to people facing a personal safety threat.

Compliance with requests for silent lines is priority for Telstra as we know how important it is to honour the preference of someone not to have their details publicly accessible. However, we acknowledge we have more work to do in this area. We have recently made changes to make it clearer for customers that they must tell us if they want a silent line and are putting in place processes and training to ensure all staff deliver on our commitments to customers.

Support for staff – Family and Domestic Violence Support Policy

Family violence can impact an individual's engagement, productivity and health and safety in the workplace, as well as potentially affecting their co-workers. For this reason, we recently announced a new policy for Telstra employees, designed to provide support to those who may be experiencing family and domestic violence.



The Family and Domestic Violence Support Policy provides Telstra employees in Australia who are experiencing the effect of violence by a family member, or current or former intimate partner of any sex with access to up to 10 days paid leave (unpaid for casuals) each year, with Telstra having the discretion to provide more leave if needed. This is in addition to all current leave entitlements.

We also provide our people with practical resources to support their wellbeing and safety, including as part of learning courses undertaken by all staff.

Another way we raise awareness is through our long-term support of **White Ribbon**, a male-led campaign to raise awareness and prevent violence against women. As a White Ribbon accredited workplace, we continue to take active steps to stop this violence and to show we care.

Our efforts around this issue encompass our staff, our customers and our communities, and in doing so, we hope to make a real difference. For further information on our initiatives in this area please contact our Corporate Affairs Manager, Natalie Collard, on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

I trust that this information is of assistance to the commission and I look forward to the Commission's report in February 2016.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

James Shaw
Director
Government Relations
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