



Support, Help, & Empowerment (SHE) Inc.

October 2017

Submission to the Women's Strategy 2018-2020

For further information on this submission, please contact:

Alina Thomas, CEO

0438788291

ceo@she.org.au

About Support, Help and Empowerment (SHE)

Established in 1989, Support, Help, & Empowerment (SHE) is the leading non-government agency in Tasmania supporting people who have experienced domestic and family violence (DFV). SHE advocates for an end to all violence against women. SHE is a dynamic and evolving professional feminist organisation with philosophies, practice and resources founded on current research. SHE has a high level of skill, knowledge and experience working with and on behalf of women, children, families, and communities affected by violence.

Services we offer include trauma informed and evidence-based counselling, education and support for groups and individuals affected by violence, information and referral, community training and education, production of innovative and evidence-based resources, and advocacy for systemic change to gender inequity and violence against women.

A note on gender

SHE recognises that gender is not a binary category of sex differences but that gender presents itself in multiple states that can be fixed or fluid depending on the identity and physical characteristics of the individual person. While SHE employs the term 'women' in this discussion piece, under the Tasmanian Women's Strategy we encourage the consideration of all people who do not identify as men.

General Comments

SHE commends the Tasmanian Government's commitment to addressing the issues affecting women and girls in Tasmania. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Women's Strategy to address the inequality experienced by women and girls in Tasmania.

Before considering the main priority areas for action, we would like to discuss some key points that underpin each of these areas, which we believe the Strategy must address to create meaningful change.

For gender equality to exist, we must recognise and actively challenge gender-based oppression. To do this, it is useful to take a socio-ecological approach to consider the norms, practices, and structures that perpetuate oppression and inequality. As Tasmania's preferred provider for White Ribbon training, and as an organisation with years of experience providing education on gender inequality, oppression, and DFV, we have heard repeatedly from businesses, service providers, and the broader community about the desperate need for more education about the social and cultural norms that underpin gender inequality and DFV, and practical tools that individuals and organisations can use to identify and confront the attitudes and practices that perpetuate this oppression. We would like to see the Women's Strategy recognise the importance of addressing these norms, as well as the institutional and community practices that reflect them, and the formal and informal structures that support them.

Recommendation 1. The Women's Strategy must take a socio-ecological approach to identify and challenge the norms, practices and structures that perpetuate gender-based oppression and inequality.

At the same time, it is essential that we be mindful that historically, efforts to combat gender inequality and gender-based oppression have often focused on their impacts on a specific subset of women who experience considerable privilege in other aspects of their lives. This focus has sometimes been at the expense of the needs and rights of women who experience multiple forms of oppression, including Aboriginal women, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women, women with disabilities, and LGBTIQ women. For genuine, sustainable change for all women and girls, it is vital to take an intersectional approach to understanding and addressing oppression, recognising that different forms of power and oppression interact in subtle and complex ways.

Further, we must give women of diverse backgrounds and experiences opportunities to lead conversations about what change must happen and how, ensuring that they and their lived experiences are valued and heard. For the Women's Strategy to make real strides towards justice and equality, it must recognise diverse women not as 'vulnerable' or 'at risk' women. It must recognise them as women who – in spite of ongoing oppression and injustice - have unique and valuable perspectives, strengths, and resources to offer the community. They are the ones holding the most knowledge and expertise about their lives, and as such, they are best placed to develop creative and sustainable ways to improve their lives. We owe it to them to listen.

Recommendation 2. The Women's Strategy should adopt the following principles:

- a. Gender-based oppression does not impact all women equally, and as such, an intersectional approach is essential to avoid perpetuating other forms of oppression, inequality and disadvantage.
- b. Change must be led by women of diverse backgrounds and informed by their lived experience of the issues that face them.

Economic empowerment

Women's economic empowerment and financial security is of fundamental importance in promoting and achieving gender equality. Economic empowerment enables women to make their own choices, be resilient, in control and live an independent life with dignity.

Women living in poverty

It is impossible to discuss economic empowerment without acknowledging that many women in Tasmania cannot afford to meet their most basic needs, including those related to housing, food, health, and wellbeing. Women are more likely to experience poverty than men, and Tasmanian women are at even greater risk of experiencing poverty than other Australian women (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2016). As such, the Tasmanian Government has a unique responsibility to demonstrate leadership in developing state policies and advocating for federal policies that address the challenges for women living in poverty and on low incomes. We would like to see the Women's Strategy commit to working with the community and exploring available evidence to develop creative ways of addressing poverty in Tasmania, such as a Universal Basic Income trial. As we have already discussed, women with lived experience of poverty must be given opportunities to lead these conversations, and actively contribute to the development of innovative policy that meets their needs.

Recommendation 3. Develop strategies to engage directly with women on low incomes and provide them with opportunities to direct innovative, sustainable change in the policies affecting their lives on both state and federal levels.

The gender pay gap

The gender pay gap remains one of the main barriers to economic equality for Australian women. Australian women have some of the highest rates of part-time employment in the world (OECD 2017), and are more affected by issues of underemployment and casual employment than men (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2016). In Tasmania, the gender pay gap between working men and women as of November 2015 amounted to a difference in average weekly earnings of \$173.60 (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2016). This pay gap stems from range of factors, including lower wages in female-dominated industries, interrupted work patterns from women's significantly larger share of carer and parental responsibilities, stereotypes about how women's labour, and underrepresentation of women in senior positions (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2016).

Employers must be encouraged to make workplace gender equity and gender pay equity priorities through increased awareness and understanding of the benefits that equity can bring, support to make positive changes, and transparent reporting on outcomes. A range of supports is needed to target the diverse causes of gender inequity, for example, incentives to hire people transitioning out of parenting and carer roles, use gender-blind hiring practices, or increase workplace flexibility arrangements to better accommodate women and families.

Recommendation 4. Provide information and support (including creative incentive programs) for Tasmanian employers to adopt practices that would increase gender equity

Gender imbalances in the distribution of care and unpaid work

As already mentioned, one of the main factors that contributes to the gender pay gap is women's disproportionately large responsibility for unpaid care work and household duties. In Australia, women spend twice as much time performing unpaid labour, such as preparing meals, looking after children and taking care of older people or people with a disability. According to the 2016 Census, the typical Australian woman spends five to 14 hours a week doing unpaid domestic work.

Unpaid care work and household labour is essential to the social and economic wellbeing of individuals, families and societies, but inequality in its distribution remains an obstacle to achieving gender equality in the workforce and to women's financial empowerment more broadly. This inequality reinforces gender stereotypes and expectations around women and care, which contributes to discrimination and structural bias such that an Australian woman newly graduated from university will earn 4.4% less than her male counterpart when applying for a similar job (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2016). Changing existing gender norms and stereotypes has been identified as the first step in making a serious shift in the imbalance of care and unpaid work (Ferrant, Pesando & Nowacka 2014; Australian Human Rights Commission 2013), so that care is not seen as an inherently female responsibility. This requires campaigns to challenge stereotypes and norms, as well as consideration of the legal, regulatory, and policy frameworks that perpetuate the gender imbalance in care and unpaid work.

At the same time, it is vital that the worth and value of both paid and unpaid forms of care are recognised. Added incentives for people to take on paid and unpaid carer roles are needed, such as increased support for unpaid carers (including financial support, for example, government superannuation contributions for carers), and pathways for people to translate the knowledge and skills gained from lived experience as carers into formal qualifications. Specialised support is also needed for women transitioning out of parenting and carer roles to engage in education and/or employment.

Recommendation 5. Develop innovative strategies to address the gendered nature of care and unpaid work.

Recommendation 6. Recognise the value of care work by providing increased support and incentives for carers, including adequate Centrelink benefits and professional development opportunities.

Leadership and participation

Improving women's public participation lies in redefining how gender roles are valued in the community. Likewise, increasing numbers and the scope of women in leadership roles will involve rethinking how women are defined as leaders across all tiers of our society which is often undervalued, if not invisible.

While it is evident that men typically occupy traditional leadership roles at a much higher rate than women (even in women dominated work forces) it is not valid to say that women are not sufficiently performing as leaders in the community. The phenomena that distinguishes common leadership positions for men in contrast with common leadership positions for women, isn't necessary the responsibility, scope or impact of the roles but rather the status or value that is attributed the roles.

When women perform complex and expert leadership roles in the community, these roles are valued as less important than the roles that men typically perform. Examples of this include;

- Women who perform as leaders in the community sector carry the responsibility of running businesses while addressing complex social and health issues.
- Low income mothers use high levels of budgeting skills to provide their children with adequate nutrition, opportunities for exploration and development with minimal resources.
- Carers address end-of-life issues and the complex health needs of dependent family members.
- Teachers, childcare workers, and nurses all carry huge responsibilities for the health and well-being of others, in particular the most deserving members of our society (children).

Men need to be encouraged and supported into typically female roles with the same fervour as women are supported into typically male professional spaces.

SHE argues that revaluing "traditional" women's work will directly encourage more men to enter the roles. This will need to occur by increasing economic and status incentives.

Recommendation 7. That traditional women's leadership be fully recognised for the scope of its responsibility and skill.

Recommendation 8. Engage with women in the community to determine what they need to develop and support existing and emerging leaders in the community.

Recommendation 9. Implement more training in schools that addresses negative or limiting attitudes and beliefs about gender, so that young people are supported into a range of employment options outside of gendered norms.

Recommendation 10. Resource programs that support and encourage women and men to pursue education, employment, and cultural opportunities in fields where they are under-represented.

Recommendation 11. Increase award wages for typically female work to be attractive to all genders.

Health and wellbeing

Social disadvantage greatly affects access to health services and resources as well as undermining the resources stemming from the social determinants of health. Health and wellbeing promotion and prevention strategies, particularly for 'at risk' or marginalised population groups, (such as young and older women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disabilities and lesbian and bisexual women) should be directed as much as possible by women who belong to these groups themselves in recognition of the invaluable knowledge, skills, and expertise they can contribute. Encouraging and supporting leadership from people within these groups in developing and implementing these strategies will also help ensure that the strategies are relevant, targeted and free from stigma and judgement. For example, women with a disability are subject to myths about their sexuality, perpetuating the notion that they are non-sexual and therefore do not require sex education.

With higher rates of teen pregnancy in Tasmania than the national average, programs and service that promote sexual health and education need to be proactive and pragmatic, reflecting the practices of young people and the broader population that promote responsibly and harm reduction rather than abolition. Sex education for girls needs to refer to sex for pleasure and not solely reduced to reproduction. Access to contraception needs to be free and easy for all women.

Alcohol and other drug treatment services are lacking in gender considerations and women's options for residential rehab are very limited. Punitive approaches to alcohol to drug use increase the burden of stigma on people who use drugs, become a barrier to accessing services and ultimately place women into the criminal justice system who would be more effectively treated by tailored health services.

Women perform criminal acts in different ways to men and have vastly different experiences of incarceration. Therefore a gendered lens needs to be given to the sentences of women's felons that take into consideration the life-experiences of the person and direct impact on her children.

Gender norms, stereotypes and gender status all compromise the rights, opportunities and full possibilities for girls and women. Discrimination, subordination, the value placed on narrow ideas of beauty and attractiveness (inflamed by social media) impact directly on women's self-esteem, and perception of worth.

In general women have lower incomes than men and more women live below the poverty line than men. Therefore, women have fewer resources to secure commodities, purchase services, pursue educational, self-care, leisure or creative activities. In the context of socioeconomic disadvantage, women are more susceptible to suffering from mental health complications.

Recommendation 12. Take a holistic approach to address factors impacting on women's health and wellbeing, including housing, mental health, and food security.

Recommendation 13. Increase availability of secure housing for women, particularly women experiencing family violence.

Recommendation 14. Sexual and reproductive health and rights must represent all genders and sexual orientations, regardless of sero-status and sexual health status.

Recommendation 15. Adopt harm minimisation approaches to issues affecting the safety of women, including drug and alcohol use.

Recommendation 16. Improve programs and resources for people transitioning out of prison, informed by people with lived experience of incarceration.

Safety

With respect to women's safety, we have decided to focus on the issue of Domestic and Family Violence (DFV), as it is without question one of the primary concerns related to the safety of women in Tasmania. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) has been identified as the leading contributor to death, disability, and ill-health in Australia for women aged 15-44 years, and its contribution to the burden of disease is more than five times higher for Aboriginal women (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation 2004; Webster 2016). DFV and its impacts are preventable with proper intervention, support for women's recovery, and by addressing known root causes. This requires a coordinated, evidence-based approach, and while Tasmania is making significant strides towards this with *Safe Homes, Safe Families* and the *Safe at Home* initiative, more work is needed.

Specialised family violence and women's services

Specialised DFV and women's services like SHE play a vital role in providing the best possible outcomes for women affected by violence, and in working towards the end of DFV and violence against women. The effectiveness of specialised services is underpinned by practice principles supported by international research and evidence-based practice (Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) 2016). While the complex and varied needs of women affected by violence require the availability of a broad range of organisations and services for holistic support, SHE recognises a shortfall among non-specialised family violence responses in the recognition and description of behaviours that constitute family violence, and how to safely respond to people who are using or affected by these behaviours. Specialised DFV services make an invaluable contribution to the safety and wellbeing of women affected by violence through comprehensive risk assessment and safety planning, as well as evidence-based and trauma-informed interventions, and advocacy and education related to systemic and cultural issues. We lead much needed dialogue in the community about gender inequality and DFV, raising awareness and understanding of the causes and impacts of both. Even so, an immense amount of community education about DFV is still needed – for example, less than 50% of people who witness violence, sexism, or discrimination in social or workplace contexts report that they would say or do something in response (Powell 2012). The increasing demand for specialised services must be met with an increase in resourcing if we are to continue meeting the needs of the community and of women affected by violence.

Recommendation 17. Prioritise resourcing of specialised family violence and women's organisations to prevent and respond to DFV through direct support to women and broader community education.

Placing women with lived experience of DFV at the heart of reforms

Women who have been affected by DFV are uniquely positioned to understand it, and to offer insight into the changes that must happen to address it. But DFV demands silence – from survivors, from the systems and structures that survivors must navigate, and from the community as a whole - and so overwhelmingly, survivors' voices continue to go unheard. Fortunately, there are examples of efforts being made to break this silence, such as the Victim Survivors Advisory Council created in Victoria to lead cultural change and contribute meaningfully to DFV reform after Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence acknowledged the power of lived experiences of victims and survivors. We believe that Tasmania desperately needs a similar advisory council, with the support of specialised DFV services to maximise the safety and wellbeing of the women involved. This would

give women the opportunity to become leaders in creating real, meaningful change. We hear repeatedly from women who participate in our services about how valuable it is for them to see other women speaking openly about their own experiences with DFV. It is a powerful reminder that women affected by violence are so much more than invisible 'victims' or stereotypes, they are human beings with diverse backgrounds and experiences. An advisory council of women with lived experience of DFV would act as a formal acknowledgement of the strength, resilience, and worth that they have to offer, and provide other women with much needed hope that change is possible.

Recommendation 18. Establish an advisory council of women with lived experience of DFV to engage in advocacy and community education, and inform and direct Tasmania's policy and responses to family violence.

Addressing the barriers for women seeking help for DFV

SHE clients who have experienced DFV have continued to report distressing and confusing responses from Tasmania Police and Child Safety Services. It is estimated that 60% of women who recognise abusive and violent behaviour in their intimate relationship do not seek police involvement (Our Watch, 2015). Rather, in many instances women see the police and Child Safety Services as adversarial services, to be avoided and not to be trusted. We have witnessed the impact of the threat of investigation from Tasmania Police and Child Safety Services on women who are unsafe in relationships. Many women who attend SHE express reluctance to involve police, who they feel contribute to their sense of powerlessness and confusion via inconsistent and sometimes invalidating responses, as well as processes that are difficult to understand. This is particularly true for women who have children, or women who fear or mistrust police for other reasons, such as belonging to communities with past experiences of oppression and mistreatment from police and government bodies (eg. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, LGBTIQ women, or refugee and migrant women), or women who have past or ongoing involvement in criminal activities or drug use.

If we want all women to feel safe seeking support from Tasmania Police or engaging with Child Safety Services, we need to ensure that their diverse needs are consistently met with empathy and understanding. This requires increased, open dialogue between women from diverse backgrounds (particularly those with lived experience of DFV, or the specialised services that work with them), and Tasmania Police and Child Safety Services to explore the barriers to engagement and creative ways to overcoming these barriers. Greater clarity and transparency about the processes and outcomes for women who engage with Tasmania Police and Child Safety Services after incidences of DFV is also needed, so that women can understand what may result in such services being involved, and accurately assess the risks and benefits to the safety and wellbeing of themselves and their family.

Recommendation 19. Increase collaboration between Tasmania Police and Child Services and women from diverse backgrounds and with experiences of DFV to determine ways to overcome barriers to women seeking help.

Recommendation 20. Commit to increasing publicly available information about Child Safety Services and Tasmania Police processes and outcomes related to DFV incidents.

Addressing issues within the Tasmanian legal system for women affected by DFV

The experiences of SHE clients with the Tasmanian legal system mirrors broader Australian research describing women's experiences of invalidation, fear, anxiety, and retraumatisation in legal processes related to DFV (Roberts, Chamberlain & Delfabbro 2015). In an independent review of Tasmania's Safe at Home initiative, a specialist Family Violence Court was recommended to improve protection for witnesses and children, provide better quality information to courts, ensure privacy, and make better use of specialist family violence prosecutors (Successworks 2009). The effectiveness of Family Violence Courts has been demonstrated extensively in other Australian states, as well as overseas. They are particularly effective when specialised procedures, support services, offender programs, and arrangements for survivor safety are incorporated. We believe a specialised Court could offer women greater sensitivity to their needs, better consistency in the handling of family violence issues, and better outcomes for both survivors and offenders. We would like to see the idea explored in greater depth by the government and community more broadly.

Recommendation 21. Explore the development of a specialised Family Violence Court for Tasmania.

Conclusion

Considering the complexity of the issues covered in this discussion piece and in the Tasmanian Women's Strategy, the breadth of the issues that needs to be addressed cannot occur by individual issue in isolation to the broader social and system conditions that impact on gender inequality in Tasmania. The *Tasmanian Women's Plan 2013 – 2018* justly recognised the importance of gender mainstreaming in government policy, but we are yet to see this happen to the extent that is necessary. SHE therefore advocates for the application of a universal gender perspective to apply gender analyses to the development of government policies and services to give the analysis that is necessary to rectify the gender disparities.

The risk involved in failing to apply a gender analysis to state developed policies and processes is the possibility to perpetuate existing forms of oppression against women, limit women's autonomy and create new forms of gender inequality.

Advancing gender equality is not just about including women's participation. It will require systemic change within the structures and institutions that drive discrimination and inequality for all women.

Recommendation 22. Mainstream gender equality analysis be applied in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of all state administered policies, systems and services.

References

Australian Human Rights Commission 2013, *Investing in Care: Recognising and valuing those who care*.

Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) 2016, 'The role of specialist women's services in Australia's response to violence against women and their children'.

Department of Premier and Cabinet 2016, 'Women and Girls in Tasmania Fact Sheet 1: Economic Security and Financial Independence'.

Ferrant, G, Pesando, LM & Nowacka, K 2014, *Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes*, OECD Development Centre.

OECD 2017, 'Part-time employment rate (indicator)'.

Powell, A 2012, 'More than ready: Bystander action to prevent violence against women in the Victorian community'.

Roberts, D, Chamberlain, P & Delfabbro, P 2015, 'Women's experiences of the processes associated with the family court of Australia in the context of domestic violence: A thematic analysis', *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 599–615.

Successworks 2009, *Review of the Integrated Response to Family Violence: Final Report*.

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation 2004, *The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*, Melbourne.

Webster, K 2016, 'A preventable burden: Measuring and addressing the prevalence and health impacts of intimate partner violence in Australian women: Key findings and future directions'.