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Support Help & Empowerment (SHE) Inc.

Submission in response to the Department of Premier and Cabinet's
Call for Ideas for the Tasmanian Family Violence Action Plan

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About Support Help Empowerment (SHE)

Support Help Empowerment Inc (SHE) is a not for profit organisation that provides specialist counselling services for women who are currently, or have previously experienced family and domestic violence and other violations. Our mission is to provide women with support and information in a safe and secure environment. SHE believes people are disadvantaged by gender norms, as well as cultural, social and historical gender inequalities. We work towards the elimination of abuse and violence in Tasmania by providing an integrated response to domestic violence; we are the only organisation in southern Tasmania that offers this specialised service.

SHE was established in 1989 in acknowledgement of the long term effects of violence on women's lives. The decision to set up a women's service was based on a philosophy of equity and empowerment to ensure that women accessing the service were supported to make effective decisions based on their individual challenges and circumstances.

SHE is an advocate against family violence and all violence against women. We recognise that community change will not come about without social inclusion, education and opportunities for growth.

Call for Ideas for the Tasmanian Family Violence Action Plan: General Comments

This submission is SHE's response to the call for ideas by the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) regarding the Tasmanian Family Violence Action Plan.

SHE would like to thank the Department of Premier and Cabinet for allowing us to present our ideas about how the Tasmanian Family Violence Action Plan can best work to address domestic and family violence in the Tasmanian community. We are appreciative of the opportunity to make suggestions for the Action Plan, although we have some concern about the limited timeframe of two weeks for making submissions. We believe that more time is needed for all stakeholders to have the opportunity to take part in this discussion with particular emphasis given to people with lived experience of violence, both victims and perpetrators.

Given the short timeframe provided for submissions, SHE has not been able to address the full breadth of the priority areas for the Action Plan within this submission. However, requests for clarification or expansion on the areas discussed within this submission are welcome, and can be directed to Alina Thomas, Executive Officer of SHE.

Domestic and family violence occur when power is abused and control tactics are used to manipulate others. Family violence has typically not included other forms of violence against women nor does it include other forms of misused power and control where behaviour fall outside the typical patterns of male as perpetrator and woman as victim.

SHE believes the Action Plan must approach family violence with the intent of recognising and responding to a broader range of relationships and power dynamics within the community, with a strong focus on the women who are most often left out of the discussion. This includes, but is not limited to, LGBTI women, women with disabilities, women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and women living in non-traditional or non-nuclear households. Violence against women is one element of a cultural practice that is prevalent in interpersonal relationships in Australia: that of violence by a person with greater power over a

person with less power¹. When developing the Action Plan, we ask consideration is given to systems of power and oppression and how they impact on women's experiences of violence. To do this effectively, an intersectional approach must be taken, wherein gender is recognized as only one aspect of many identities via which women experience oppression and disempowerment. If the Action Plan fails to appreciate and address the ways in which different types of oppression impact on women's experience of violence, then it will be failing the women in our community who are already the most disempowered.

The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children and the Tasmanian Primary Prevention Strategy to Reduce Violence against Women and Children remain helpful tools for addressing domestic violence. Both of these documents detail a well-considered, evidence based strategic approach that reaches as far as 2022.

Tasmanian Family Violence Action Plan: Priority Areas

1. Addressing attitudinal behaviors that lead to family violence

The relationship between violence against women and gender inequality is well established, with the United Nations describing structural imbalances of power and inequality between men and women as both the context and cause of violence against women (United Nations, 2006). Accordingly, it is essential that we recognise that violence against women is not a collection of random and unrelated acts of abuse, but that it is the result of structurally reinforced gender inequality that systematically disadvantages women and gender-diverse individuals. As such, family violence, and violence against women generally, will continue to be an issue as long as access to opportunities, outcomes, rights, and obligations is impacted by a person's gender, and the distribution of power and influence is disproportionately skewed in favour of men.

One of the key areas for achieving gender equality is increasing the number of women in leadership (Australian Human Rights Commission's Gender Equality Blueprint, 2010). The Tasmanian Government must contribute to initiatives that address barriers to women's participation in senior leadership positions including parliamentary positions, senior corporate positions and senior public service executives (Australian Human Rights Commission's Gender Equality Blueprint, 2010). Having women involved in leadership isn't just to go "one for one" with men but is to have women involved in decision making so that the perspective and issues pertaining to women are considered. Furthermore, when women are given positions of power, it acts as a real and tangible demonstration of the values of the organisation and broader community, promoting gender inclusion which is vital for young women and men who are still forming their beliefs about what women are capable of. The Tasmanian Government can also strengthen policies that assist women and men to balance family responsibilities with paid work (e.g. paid parental leave, paid paternity leave, flexible work culture, accessible & affordable childcare), as well as advocating for change in Federal IR laws to address the ongoing and well documented issue of the gender pay-gap that continues to benefit men by an average of almost 20% nationally (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015, Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2014).

Systematic change is required within Tasmania to amend the community systems in Tasmania that "grant men the right to control female behaviour and limit women's power in both public and private life" (STRIVE 2011, page xii). The cultural values and structures that allow domestic violence to occur are held deep in our individual and collective psyche. The backlash

¹ Power includes physical, social, economic power that can be assumed or given, it also includes privileged and assumed entitlement.

against women who speak out against systemic sexism is often fiercely violent, and involves threats of death, rape and other hideous assaults. The explanation, description, presentation and marketing of gender equality to the wider public is a challenge for all stakeholders committed to eliminating domestic and family violence that needs to be taken very seriously. It needs to be palatable and accessible. As racism feeds racial violence and homophobia feeds violence against LGBTI communities, sexism creates the immediate and tangible path to violence against women.

2. Ensuring that Safe at Home remains the nation's best response model

SHE commends the government on the ongoing support given to Safe at Home in Tasmania, however it is only one part of the response to family violence in the Tasmanian Community.

ANROWS statistics (based on ABS report 2014) state that 42% of women who recognise that they are being subjected to violence and abuse contact the police. The statistics further describe that 24% of women who recognise that they are being subjected to violence and abuse never seek any support or advice. 34% of women who recognise that they are being subjected to violence and abuse therefore **access community services alone**. This percentage is additional to the significant number of those who have also sought police interventions **as well as** community services.

Community services play a key role in prevention, intervention, education, support and safety. Such services are best placed to access the women who are yet to engage any support, as well as the unquantifiable number of women who do not recognise the abuse occurring in their relationship as a crime or violation due to a lack of awareness, social isolation, assumed blame, on-going coercive control, gas lighting and other tactics.

Community services are also uniquely positioned to be collaborating with women (and men and children) who have lived experience of violence. They can engage with individuals and communities to ensure greater community accountability, more relevant service provision, mobilisation of communities, social inclusion and added value for all stakeholders. (See appendix 1). Safe at Home could certainly benefit from increased consultation with community services, who have invaluable expertise regarding family violence, as well as a deep engagement with the community.

Fiona McCormac (CEO, DV Victoria) states that improved police conduct and service approaches increases reporting and demand for follow up services (Radio National, June 2015). Victorian domestic violence prevention workers have stressed the value of employing people who have experienced domestic violence as advocates, role models and educators (Loxton, Hosking et al. 2008: 26-27). We believe that an essential part of improving police conduct and services is employing women who have experienced family violence in roles designed specifically to utilise their lived experience. Not only is there scope to include women with lived experience of family violence when working directly with the community, such as in community education and engagement roles, but they would also be a critical resource when designing and evaluating policy and services. Furthermore, the valued presence of women with lived experience of violence within the Tasmanian Police would contribute to a more inclusive and understanding culture within the force. By creating paid roles for women with lived experiences, the police could make a powerful commitment to promoting the voices of women who have experienced violence, building on existing efforts to make the Tasmanian Police more accessible and inclusive for women in the community. This will increase the proportion of women who report incidence of family violence.

3. Strengthening support for adults and children affected by family violence

While it could be argued that some of the following areas fall outside the scope of the Action Plan that is being developed, we believe that these issues are inseparable from women's experience of family violence. Supporting people affected by violence certainly involves increased funding for services such as counselling, however it also requires changes to policies that contribute to women's inability to leave situations of family violence, and that make it immensely difficult for women to rebuild their lives if and when they are able to leave.

Economic Security

There are a number of ways in which policies can address ways to ensure women's economic security (e.g. pay equity, gender equality legislation, protection from workplace harassment & bullying, workplace family violence leave). Women who are experiencing financial hardship are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of domestic violence. Lack of financial independence is a powerful barrier for women attempting to leave and may limit the ability of women to care for themselves and their children, to pursue legal matters, and find appropriate accommodation. Victims of domestic violence also report that transport difficulties, including barriers to obtaining a driver's licence, may prevent them from finding employment and financial independence from an abusive partner. Workplace provisions such as the Tasmania Family Violence- Workplace Provisions for State Service Employees can support employees experiencing domestic violence and should be expanded.

Housing

The Government must strengthen the availability of alternative accommodation for women wishing to leave abusive relationships, including access to emergency accommodation and affordable rental properties. Women (particularly single women and those with children) are often forced to choose between whether to stay in an abusive relationship or to become homeless. Risks of homelessness will force women to stay in unsafe environments or go into situations that may be a risk to their safety and wellbeing.

Opportunities for women to be free from domestic violence are provided by the availability of suitable public housing and affordable private rental housing. The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) can help ensure that women have access to emergency accommodation. The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPAHIH) may assist indigenous women who are victims of family violence access safe housing.

Service provision

The Government needs to ensure that there is adequate funding for domestic violence services, including services that provide longer-term counselling. SHE provides long-term counselling for women who are in, or have been in, abusive relationships and believe that this is a vital service for families recovering from domestic violence. Practitioners recognise the complexity of each women's situation and assist them to identify their strengths, resources and coping skills while supporting them to make their own informed choices. SHE clients regularly report positive outcomes and an increasingly readiness to engage in the next stage of their lives.

The influence of violence can persist long after an individual has left an abusive relationship (VicHealth, 2006). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder has emerged as a considerable barrier to women reintegrating and recovering from domestic violence. SHE counselling is paced in a

way that promotes safety and stabilisation and is mindful of the complex interpersonal trauma and the complicated grief/loss associated with intimate partner violence.

There is a need for services in the community that incorporate lived experience of family violence. An example of how to include people with lived experience is one that is developed from the 'bottom up'. WOWSafe is a peer support program where women who have lived with violent partners provide practical and emotional support to women currently experiencing domestic violence. This is a largely voluntary program currently supported by the Adelaide Central Community Health Service that provides a part time worker, venue and clerical support. WOWSafe encourages sound practice by stressing safety of the peer supporters through debriefing and workload distribution for emotional safety, and police and mobile phone back-up for physical safety when providing support. Although not evaluated, this service has been in operation since 1993 and should therefore be considered an example of a successful grass roots 'self-help' organisation that has developed collaborative links with other agencies (police, court, health) and offers services not otherwise available (e.g. assistance with furniture removal, car repair, pet minding).

Primary prevention programs

The prevention of domestic violence requires long-term, integrated strategies such as national education and awareness campaigns that infiltrate homes, workplaces and social spaces. SHE would like to see respectful relationship and consent programs strengthened in the curriculum in all schools in Tasmania so that it is progressive, pragmatic, relevant and accessible. Schools are ideally placed to implement evidence-supported strategies to promote attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that support respectful relationships and establish an intolerance of violence, gender inequality and constrictive adherence to gender norms among children and young people. Furthermore, SHE would like to see respectful relationships and consent campaigns, including social marketing and awareness campaigns, being implemented more broadly across other community groups, such as sporting groups, community organisations, workplaces and the media.

4. Strengthen legal responses to family violence

Criminal justice-based approaches must ensure that the safety of the person who has experienced family violence is of primary concern. The Family Law system must address the challenges faced by victims of domestic violence attempting to establish physically and emotionally safe arrangements for their children. Without legal support women remain impoverished and economically disadvantaged. People who have experienced violence need access to information regarding their legal rights, and legal services such as the Women's Legal Services, Community Legal Services and the family violence prevention legal services are critical for many women who are experiencing violence. Budget cuts to community legal services have significant negative impact on victims of domestic violence seeking legal protection. The Government must prioritise funding for these services.

Non-government interventions need to be widely available for those members of the community who are unable to access traditional justice due to criminality, assumed criminality, marginalisation and other mechanisms that create fear and mistrust of state systems.

SHE endorses calls to establish a Family Violence Court in Tasmania as well as changes that need to be made to current practices. SHE would like to see changes made to methods of giving evidence in court by women and children so that perpetrators of violence cannot cross examine the victim of the violence, nor should the 'victim' have to give evidence in the presence of the perpetrator or any of his friends or family members. SHE would like to see a

review of bail conditions and duration of bail, in view to the rights of perpetrators and the safety of their victims

5. Strengthen perpetrator management and rehabilitation

The peer reviewed literature currently finds that perpetrator programs have limited success in reducing recidivism rates.

In addition to the unclear outcomes of perpetrator programs, a number of other barriers to program implementation have been identified:

- Perpetrator programs being potentially inappropriate in rural areas due to concerns about anonymity, and community attitudes that support male control over female partners,
- Eligibility restrictions for programs that disadvantage perpetrators with complex issues - in a review of international perpetrator programs the WHO reported that perpetrators who have a mental health diagnosis, substance abuse disorder, or who are violent or disruptive during intervention sessions were likely to be excluded from perpetrator programs.
- Female perpetrator programs have attracted little attention in the peer reviewed literature, although one paper recommended that female perpetrator interventions needed to take past victimisation into account.

The low success rate of perpetrator programs makes it impossible to recommend particular programs at this point in time. However, since even a 5% decrease in recidivism is a positive result, the following points can be suggested:

- The safety of potential victims and their children should remain the top priority of any program designed to reduce domestic violence perpetrator recidivism,
- Rigorous evaluation of current programs should be undertaken so that recidivism and behavioural changes are measured pre- and post-treatment, and
- Monitoring the literature for advances in the field will assist with developing this area further (Loxton, Hosking et al. 2008: 14-15).

Not all men are violent towards women but all men can play very important part in reducing violence against women. These opportunities need to be explored and actively implemented and need to raise awareness of assumed power, unconscious bias, implicit and benevolent sexism as well as hostile sexism. It needs to be announced that sexual harassment, gender based cyber bullying, sexist jokes, unequal contributions to domestic duties etc all contribute to gender inequality and consequently create the environment that sustains the prevalence of domestic and family violence.

Australian culture has many values, norms and beliefs that support greater male power (e.g. norms relating to males being more competent than women in various domains valued by society). Attitudes towards violence correlate strongly with exposure to violence and may be transferred across generations via learning processes, schools, the media and experience of violence. Whether a person acts on their attitudes depends on their assessment of what others think and the presence of factors in the social environment that either sanction or condemn violent behaviour (VicHealth, 2006). Consequently, there are opportunities for men to learn ways to challenge violence-supportive attitudes and to increase the use of respectful rather than aggressive ways to respond to life's challenges. One such approach employed by SHE is the Mentors Against Violence program. This program uses the "Bystander" model and focuses on men as empowered individuals who can communicate the message that sexism and violence against women is unacceptable.

Other factors of intersectionality including poverty, poor access to education, alcohol and other drug treatments, experiences of citizenship and opportunities to make meaningful contributions, homophobia and exclusion of LGBTI people all need to be addressed when changing cultures around men's roles, masculinity and gender..

Concluding comments, necessary actions and recommendations

The extent that we are able to adhere to policy frameworks (the National Plan and other strategies) and their consequent success will only reach as far as the money invested in it will allow. As an illustration of the current situation of Tasmanian's domestic violence services, SHE's current counselling service is impacted by a three week waitlist for potential clients.

There is a clear demand for more action in the community to address family violence – increased training within services and the broader community, counselling and education groups for women and families, up to date and locally relevant resources about family violence, skills development for women leaving violent relationships, and community development – however, we lack the financial resources to provide enough services to meet the demand. Significant investing in family and domestic violence will increase the chances of successful outcomes, it also a gesture as to how seriously the issue is taken by the Tasmanian Government.

1. Primary prevention: (respectful relationships, parenting support) can be tailored to specific environments and provided by SHE (SHE already does this to the extent that resources permit).
2. Workplace training: SHE is strategically placed to be rolling out training to front line services around recognising and responding to domestic violence. Again, this is a service that SHE already provides but it is not approached comprehensively due to under resourcing.
3. Counselling interventions: a significant gap in services exists for children affected by domestic violence. SHE's would like to extend its current counselling service to reduce existing wait list, enhance delivery of support groups in order to reach greater numbers of clients with limited resources and to be able to have a specialist children's worker.
4. Community Capacity development: In order for at-risk communities to respond to and assimilate anti-family violence messages they need to be resourced with greater capacity to engage, respond and support individuals. As a trusted community based organisation SHE is well placed to offer additional services in supporting community initiated projects with people affected by family violence.

The lived experience of people who have been affected by family violence is an invaluable resource that needs to be harnessed (see appendix one) but it is a strategy that also needs resourcing.

5. Inclusion: SHE would like to see tailored responses and programs that work with women with disabilities, LGBTI communities, people adversely affected by alcohol and other drugs and women and men from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds. SHE has already done substantial work with women with disabilities as well as LGBTI

groups and need to be able to strengthen responses to marginalised and socially isolated groups.

6. The Tasmanian Family Violence Action Plan must:
 - Contribute to initiatives that address barriers to women's participation in all sectors of society on equal terms with men Gender Equality Blueprint (2010).
 - Strengthen policies that assist women and men to balance family responsibilities with paid work including flexible work culture, accessible & affordable childcare, paid paternity leave and paid parental leave.
 - Address women's economic security including the delivery of greater pay equity, gender equality legislation, protection from workplace harassment & bullying.
 - Strengthen policies and investments that assist women to access safe emergency accommodation, appropriate public housing and affordable private rental housing.
 - Increased funding for critical legal services that support women in domestic violence situations such as Women's Legal Services, Community Legal Services and Legal Aid.
 - Increased investment in specialised services for women and children affected by domestic violence including trauma-informed longer term counselling services for women and children.
 - The implementation of respectful relationships and consent campaigns as part of the school curriculum nation-wide and more broadly across other community groups, such as sporting groups, community organisations, workplaces and the media.

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Appendix 1.

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