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Torturous day for a grieving mother



Valentyna Poltavchenko and her daughter Summer, 7, in Centennial Park ahead of Valentyna's first Mother's Day without Bondi shooting victim Matilda. Picture: Justin Lloyd

Lisa Mayoh

Sunday will be Valentyna Poltavchenko's first Mother's Day without her Matilda "Bee" – and the hardest milestone yet since losing her little girl.

The once cherished day will be torturous for the grieving mum, as she clings to photos of last year's celebrations happily surrounded by her three children – a feeling once taken for granted. But not now.

Since losing her joyous 10-year-old daughter at the December 14 Bondi terror attack, her family's priorities have shifted. In March, Valentyna and Matilda's father Michael got married at Admiralty House to cement their longstanding relationship, Michael in yellow shoes for their baby "bee" and matching rings adorned in the symbol now synonymous with their daughter.

Soon they will buy a new family home with the more than \$1m generously donated by the world who felt their pain, and as each day passes, Valentyna spends more time than ever in Bondi – desperate to feel closer to her lost girl in the very place that took her from them.

But new starts don't make their loss easier. Valentyna still doesn't feel safe. Targeted for wearing her Star of David, hiding it is something she will not do. She has to be strong, for Matilda's younger sister Summer, who doesn't like to see her mum cry. But cry she does.

"I have a couple of very close friends where I could just go and cry, and they don't ask questions, they just hold me tight, and then that's it," she said of how she copes.

Valentyna knows her family will never be the same.

But despite the tragedy that changed them, her other children – Matilda's big brother Vadym, 24, and little sister Summer, 7 – still see the good in people.

READ THE FULL STORY IN TODAY'S TASWEEKEND



Plan to help GPs spot family violence signs

Bridget Clarke

A Tasmanian pilot program helping GPs better support patients experiencing family and sexual violence has recorded strong statewide uptake, with about 80 clinics taking part in its first year.

Tasmanian family violence organisation Engender Equality's Primary Care Family and Sexual Violence (PCFSV) Support Program provides resources, education and training to GPs to better support patients experiencing family and sexual violence.

Over the past year, the organisation, which is rolling out

the program with sexual-assault support service Laurel House, has contacted every Tasmanian GP clinic to provide information, training, and access to dedicated support specialists assigned to each practice.

The program aims to build staff capacity to identify and respond effectively to disclosures of family violence, sexual violence and sexual abuse.

Engender Equality CEO Alina Thomas said the program leverages the important role GPs play as a point of disclosure for victim-survivors.

Data from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study

shows that, on average, around 28 per cent of women who attend a Tasmanian general practice each day are victim-survivors of family or sexual violence, while nearly 30 per cent of all people have experienced child sexual abuse.

Each week, on average, at least five patients visiting a GP are experiencing family and sexual violence and/or child sexual abuse.

"As a first responder, the GP's response can possibly govern what's next in terms of women being able to increase their safety and supports," Ms Thomas said.

"It's really important that

the response is informed, appropriate and helpful.

"That means supporting staff to build that trust with patients, so that they can check in on them when they're worried about their risk and safety, for example.

"They can also do secondary consultations on how to do mandatory reports to child safety services or how to document disclosures of family violence in notes in a way that might be better for health outcomes as well as justice outcomes."

Ms Thomas said the results of the 12-month rollout – which has reached remote

clinics including on Flinders Island, Cape Barren Island and King Island – have been encouraging, with an increase in GPs reaching out to learn how they can become involved in the initiative.

The program is federally funded through Primary Health Tasmania.

CEO Lucy O'Flaherty said it was rewarding to see the strong uptake of the service and training, with the body also working with the Safer Families Centre at the University of Melbourne to deliver further training to Tasmanian primary care providers.