

Anglicare's launch of *Young, in love and in danger: Teen domestic violence and abuse in Tasmania*

Mawson's Pavilion, Hobart, 22 November

Speech by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Leanne McLean

Thank you, Chris.

I'd also like to thank Leonie Hiscutt, attending on behalf of Minister Jaensch...

The team at SARC and especially DR Carmel Hobbs who led this ground-breaking research and enabled young people to participate in such a safe and meaningful way. It's been a great privilege to have been on that journey with you as a member of your reference group.

Most importantly, I'd like to thank and acknowledge all the young people who have suffered violence and abuse by partners in our state...

And for the courage of those who have raised their voices and in doing so demanded the community recognise that – there is no age barrier to when you can start experiencing violence or abuse at the hands of a partner. Yes! – it happens to adults. But yes! It also happens to children and young people. Age – youth – is no protection.

I cannot state how important this report is and I am honoured to help launch it.

Up till now, very little research had been done in Australia, and particularly in Tasmania, into domestic violence and abuse by partners of teens. It's hard to tackle a problem if you don't know it exists or if you don't know the extent or nature of it.

One of the shocking things we do know about teen relationship violence here in Tasmania is that it's happening and it's happening a lot. Up to 40% of young Tasmanians aged 18 to 19 may have experienced violence in their relationships in the past 12 months. Think of it: That's two out of every five 18–19-year-olds you see on the street could have experienced relationship violence. That's well above the already shocking national average of 28.5%.

And yet, these figures, and very limited figures at that, can never fully explain the experiences of individuals, or the drivers of the behaviour.

And before Dr Carmel Hobb's research, those figures had no public face. Who are these young people experiencing violence and abuse at the hands of partners? Though we might shy away from the answers to this question: What does that figure of 40% 'experiencing violence' translate into in real life for the young person experiencing the harm? Without asking the young people themselves, those of us who haven't experienced could only project an adult lens to those words. We have to ask the young people who have had these often horrific and harrowing experiences what it was like, what it meant for them at the time and what impact it's had and is having now.

That's what Carmel and her team did. They went to the young people (and those who work with them) asked their permission to understand THEIR story, and then to share the young people's stories so we as a community can understand the real nature of the problem.

As Commissioner for Children and Young People, listening to children and young people is the foundation of my work. It's one of the foundational rights of young people's human rights. It's key to tackling many of the issues that face young Tasmanians, including accessing their right to be free from violence and abuse. Listening to and acting upon things that young people and children

tell us is also fundamental to tackling problems that affect our entire community. Because what impacts upon our childhoods has long reaching impacts into our adulthood.

When I heard about Carmel's work, I was incredibly supportive. It is a true example of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child and particularly Article 12 – the right of children and young people to have their voices heard, to be involved in decisions that affect their lives – being put into action.

You'll hear about some of the experiences of young people who shared their stories today. As we listen, and no doubt at times feel uncomfortable because these stories are sometimes harrowing, it's important that we all see and hear the incredible courage of these young people. Hear the hard truth they share – and take the necessary action within our spheres of influence to prevent and respond to domestic violence and abuse.

Even if you're not a policy maker, a police officer, a political leader, you can still make a difference. As a parent, a friend, a teacher, as someone who knows and interacts with a young person in your community, read this report and remember that as a community it's often a lack of awareness that enables violence and abuse to continue.

This report, and the voices of the young people who shared their experiences, show us how misleading and dangerous the attitude towards young people and even the seemingly harmless concept of "puppy love" is in our society.

This report shines a light – it demonstrates that more research is absolutely needed, and that young people must play an ongoing role in that research if we are to truly help them achieve their right of protection from all forms of violence and abuse.

Carmel – I'm so thankful to you for undertaking what has been deeply difficult work; and I'm so deeply thankful to the fabulous and brave young people who have shared their stories – well done to you all.