




Speech By
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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Domestic and Family Violence

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (2.20 pm): When we think of the work being done in our communities to stamp out domestic violence, we usually think of the great work being done by our front-line services like the police and ambulance officers who attend domestic violence incidences and the work being done by domestic violence advocacy organisations providing shelter, counselling and support services to women and children escaping violent domestic relationships. We do not always think about the great work being done in our community to shift cultural attitudes and behaviours that tolerate and enable domestic violence. Today I want to talk about some of the work that is being done by the Domestic Violence Action Centre, or DVAC, in helping to change prevailing attitudes towards domestic and sexual violence through its fantastic high school education program, Being Heard.

DVAC is a community organisation committed to preventing and eliminating domestic and sexual violence in Ipswich and surrounding regions. Its high school program, Being Heard, is crucial in educating students about domestic violence and healthy relationships at an age when they are impressionable to ideas about what constitutes acceptable relationship behaviour. DVAC has created this program because it understands that young people are an incredible force in helping to change social norms that can lead to the elimination of domestic and sexual abuse in our society. DVAC is also well aware that many young people live with domestic and family violence and sexual abuse themselves but do not know who to turn to for help or where to find information on how they can help stop the cycle of abuse.

Research done in recent years also shows that many young people still hold unhealthy attitudes towards relationships and women and that they also lack knowledge and clarity on what constitutes domestic violence and sexual abuse. For instance, research has found that one in three young people do not think controlling someone is a form of violence, one in four young people think it is normal for guys to pressure girls into sex and one in four young people do not think it is serious when guys insult or verbally harass girls on the street. These figures are very worrying in light of the rising number of domestic violence protection orders we are seeing in Queensland and the increase in calls by women to DVConnect, not to mention the unacceptably high number of women tragically killed at the hands of their partners each year in Australia.

Ipswich itself has seen a worrying rise in DVO applications, DVO breaches and strangulation offences over the past five years. There is obviously still a lot of work to be done when it comes to shifting cultural attitudes of violence towards women, so I am grateful for DVAC's Being Heard program for reaching out to young people and enforcing the *Not now, not ever* message. Being Heard is a semester-long domestic and sexual violence program that reaches over 2,000 students in years 10, 11 and 12 in local high schools in Ipswich and surrounds. Through lessons, workshops and activities, students learn and reflect on how they perceive domestic violence and sexual abuse.

The success of its pilot program in 2017 has allowed the program to branch out to a larger number of schools in 2018, effectively doubling the number of students the program is reaching out to. Some 249 students this year also took up DVAC's intensive domestic and sexual violence education workshops held weekly over two terms and 61 students participated in a student devised production of *Being Heard* which they performed in July this year at the Ipswich Civic Centre. I have to acknowledge the extraordinary work of Sinead Cunningham, a former high school drama teacher who now works for DVAC and who really was the driving force behind this production. She is quite an extraordinary woman.

Minister Di Farmer and I had the great pleasure in attending the *Being Heard* production in July and it was wonderful to see students from various schools in Ipswich and surrounding regions unite on stage to showcase their stories reflecting on their own experience of domestic and sexual violence. Through education, activities, workshops and performance, the message is getting across to young people that domestic and sexual violence is not acceptable and should never be tolerated. I am very proud to be a member of the Palaszczuk government which has put this issue first and foremost in its first term and into our second term.

Indeed, DVAC surveyed the students who participated in the program and found that *Being Heard* is definitely having a successful outcome in terms of increasing students' overall knowledge about domestic and sexual violence. Students are increasing their understanding about what constitutes domestic and sexual violence and they are increasing their knowledge on what to do if they or a friend or family member ever found themselves in a violent relationship.

When the program finished in July, 83 per cent of students said that they now felt very knowledgeable and informed about domestic and sexual violence compared with 17 per cent at the beginning who said they only had some knowledge. No students at all came out of the program saying they had very little or no knowledge at all. For a semester-long program, this is a remarkable turnaround. It is important then that this program continues each year so that the message of zero tolerance for domestic and sexual violence can be firmly established in the hearts and minds of young people. That way, our young people can be the cultural change we need to eliminate domestic and sexual violence from our society.