

*In what further ways could we engage the expert knowledge of victim-survivors in preventing and responding to family and sexual violence in our community?*

I think providing more education to senior staff and teachers in schools could help. As a teacher and a survivor, I have noticed some trends within schools. Currently, we are seeing the same tidbit of information about how trauma affects children being taught to us over and over again. As a survivor, who has been in therapy and learning about trauma for almost 15 years, I know there is a lot more to be taught to schools than a tiny bit of information about the changes caused to the brain. As a survivor who is also a teacher, I'd like to be able to use my expert knowledge to help schools understand the effect of trauma better and to be able to respond better to family and sexual violence.

*All Tasmanians have a right to be free from family and sexual violence - what do you think would help stop family and sexual violence from happening before it starts?*

Because I am a teacher, what I see is a lot of opportunity to change the thinking of the coming generation and prevent this violence.

In the 'Safe homes, families, communities' document, it speaks about supporting "school communities to build healthy, respectful and equal relationships and address the attitudes and behaviours that lead to violence."

On the ground, I don't really see this happening. White Ribbon posters have been put up in staff rooms, but the active, every day of changing the attitudes that lead to violence, I don't see that happening. Partially, I think this is because our school leaders and teachers don't really understand what those 'attitudes' are. They are looking only for actual, physical violence or very clear, sexist terms such as 'slut'. And even then, these words are met with a degree of 'it's not that bad'.

As a child, I was the only girl in my family, and the only child abused. It was very clearly my gender that led me to be horrifically abused. We know that there are many socialised 'norms' that lead to girls and women being treated in a less than equal way and lead to violence against females. Schools desperately need to understand that these beliefs are socialised and that they need to be stopped. Attitudes such as, 'teenage girls need to have a skirt or short of a certain length' are still adhered to in many schools. I have seen them try to be enforced, and then when they are told it is discriminatory, they widen the rule to include males. But we all know it is only about females. It is only enforced in relation to girls and even worse, it is only enforced on teenage girls, as they are developing sexually. We know that this is a socialised norm that is problematic in regard to violence against women. It teaches girls and boys that it is the job of the female to cover up to make males comfortable and/or to make sure they are able to control themselves. It does not teach boys that, regardless of any situation, they are in charge of controlling their sexual behaviours and responsible for themselves.

I don't think schools are enforcing such rules because they believe boys shouldn't have to control themselves and their desires. I think that they simply do not understand the message they are sending and schools thrive on continuing social norms, so unless they are explicitly taught otherwise, this type of lessons will keep being unintentionally taught in schools and the cycle of sexual violence will continue with the next generation.

People like me, other survivors, experts who understand the thread of gender thinking that leads to violence against women could be teaching this to school staff. It is not a coincidence that sexual violence against women is more prevalent than against men and it

doesn't come out of nowhere. It begins with seemingly innocuous beliefs, such as teenage girls shouldn't wear short skirts and leads to more violent beliefs such as, 'she deserves to be raped, she was dressed like a slut, in a short skirt'.

*Everyone's experience is different - how and in what ways can we meet the needs of victim-survivors of family and sexual violence?*

Address the underlying patterns of behaviour and beliefs that lead to this violence in different societal groups. Some of these will overlap, some will be specific or more predominate in a culture.

Make a formal agreement that in Tasmania we will NOT politicise marginalised groups such as our LGBTIQ+ community members, even during election times. If you really want to make a difference, this is essential, because politicising beliefs about marginalised groups highlights their difference, creates controversy, and can lead to greater violence towards a group that just wants to be accepted.

*Children and young people are victim-survivors in their own right – in what ways can we better understand the specific experiences of children and young people in relation to family and sexual violence, and how can we better meet their needs?*

Work with survivors of childhood abuse, such as myself. We will all have different stories, but we are all impacted by the sexual and physical violence we experienced as children. Some of us will not be in a position where we are stable enough to be able to provide insight, but others are. There are people out there, like me, who have ended the cycle of violence through generations in their families. They can provide insight into how they did this and what helped them to be able to do this.

If you want to help these children, you need to get to them young. The older they get, the more difficult it will be. There are ways we can do this, working with schools, but you can't expect overworked classroom teachers to be able to do all this when they are also responsible for 20+ other students that need them in a variety of ways.

Just remember, that big overarching ideas in documents and in parliament don't make a difference in children's everyday lives. Change on the ground, in schools and homes makes that difference and this can't happen without funding.

*Tasmanians know what works best in their families and communities -*

- *What actions, initiatives, programs, and approaches are currently working well? Why are they working well?*
- *What needs to be done differently? In what ways?*
- *What do we need to do more of? Why?*

Because I am a teacher, my thinking inevitably comes back to schools. The action for awareness of the complex needs of children who've experienced trauma, is working well. All staff understand the difficulty such children are experiencing. They have learnt and they care for the children as best they can within the constraints of a school day, in a classroom with 20+ other children.

What needs to be done differently, is how we think about providing what these children need. Children that have been hurt in this way require lots of attention, love, support and

have a variety of needs, depending on how they are coping. We need more professionals to provide this support to traumatised children. But we have to also think cleverly about how we do this. Many children who experience family violence have parents who won't sign off for their child to be supported by a school psychologist or social worker. How else could we provide this needed support, that doesn't require parents' signed consent, because unfortunately, the parents in this case are often the perpetrators. Also, our school psychologists are already overrun, as it is also their job to undertake assessments for learning difficulties. Schools need a trauma-teacher. Not meaning their job is to undertake counselling, they are not qualified for that. But schools need a professional person who can also maintain quality, healing relationships with these students and can assist them when they are experiencing difficulties, take them to a calming space and work with them. This needs to be someone they see regularly and trust. We all know that children experiencing trauma can exhibit difficult, destructive behaviours and who can blame them, with what they're experiencing? The problem is, it becomes unsafe for the other children in the classroom, so they have to be taken out of the class when they're struggling, but then what happens? Principals and other senior staff are dealing with hundreds of other issues to keep the school running. Nobody wants to send the child home or suspend them, because they'll be left in the family violence. I understand that more than anyone, I don't want these children being sent home. But there has been no more thought put into place around what to put in place in schools for these children. What happens is, they end up being left in class or being brought straight back because there's no other option. Often, the other children in the class are still on edge or frightened. Learning again becomes disrupted, especially if the child is still not coping, which again, is perfectly understandable. On the one hand class teachers are stressing because they care for this child, know what they're going through at home and want to help them. On the other hand, they're stressing because they want all the other children to feel safe and they know they have a curriculum to teach and want to help all the children get to a certain standard, so they'll be able to live a good life.

Schools need a lot more funded structures around helping children who are experiencing violence or have experienced it. These relationships with staff in schools, can change the child's whole life trajectory and lead to breaking the cycle of abuse. If we get it right in schools, we can begin to change all the coming generations.

*Your voice and views matter – what else would you like to tell us as we develop our next Action Plan?*

I'd lastly like to say, that trauma experienced in childhood changes the whole way you develop and impacts your entire life, from then on. The severity and frequency of the abuse, the more difficulty one will experience. My whole life has been impacted and I deal with the result of childhood trauma every day. It effects how I think, how I react, how I trust, how I feel about everything. Navigating this minefield in one's brain is not easy. Thoughts are automated things that become ingrained and part of how you develop. There is no changing that, all that can be done is consistently manage it. This takes a lot of effort and energy and requires ongoing, professional support. Even almost 15 years after first seeking help and treatment, I continue to have to manage the effect of my childhood constantly. I have ups and downs. There are times when my brain tells me to hurt myself and I have to try and navigate around that, get help, try to get through that

moment. There are times when I feel so stressed or so sad that nothing helps. The battle with a horrible childhood is constant, it weaves its way into every part of you as you develop. It is a completely unfair result of an unfair childhood, but reality, nonetheless. Anything we can do as a state to stop trauma to young people, will make a difference and we will see this difference in so many areas in society. Overtime, it will lessen crime, lessen the amount of illiterate adults, lessen the amount of people seeking health services - not just mental, but physical. Toxic stress from childhood abuse and its impact on the physical body is beginning to become more and more understood. Clinicians in this area are referring to it as an 'epidemic', they believe it to create so many physical health conditions. I alone, have about five physical health conditions, likely caused by the amount of stress my body continually experiences because of my trauma. Imagine what even a 50% reduction in family violence would change in our society!