

Celebrating resilience in relationships

Community groups in Lismore are coming together to promote healthy relationships and to celebrate resilience in people that have experienced domestic abuse, family violence and sexual assault. There is a greater need for us all to be aware of language, situations and what we can do to contribute to a kinder, more understanding and safer community.

A spokesperson for the Lismore Domestic Violence Liaison Committee (LDVLC), Jillian Knightsmith said, "Our committee acknowledges that domestic and family violence has escalated in communities across Australia and around the world this year in the wake of COVID-19 and is now at risk of further escalation due to the impact of the recent natural disaster."

About 20 organisations come together to form the committee (LDVLC). This includes services helping women, men and children as well as whole family and gender support.

Ms Knightsmith talks of the nature of aggression at home saying there is a wide spectrum of types and severity of abuse, "Domestic and family violence is often a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour.

"Where it often begins is with controlling behaviours that may involuntarily take away your freedoms to be with others, or control finances or monitor your social and communication avenues. This can also look like threats to the safety of pets or other family

members and the person being coercive can even manipulate the situation by speaking of self harm. If you don't feel comfortable with a situation, it is good to address it, as over time, the severity can become more serious."

Healthy relationships provide autonomy over decisions about your body, mind and life. Discomfort in a decision or undue pressure over determining what is best for yourself can be an indicator that it is time to address what is really needed.

Responsibility for this kind of safety is the same as taking precautions when driving on the roads or working with tools. Ms Knightsmith says, "Organisations like ours play only a small part of the response to abuse and neglect. Family, friends and neighbours are the unsung heroes - those that are there before, in the middle of a crisis or situation, and afterwards.

"The national initiative 'Stop it at the Start' says it all. We need to be more

aware of our own mannerisms that may be contributing to the problem, as well as how to talk to people when you see something concerning in others." Like anything that doesn't go right - it is best to address it before it takes too serious a turn and breaks up a family. Or worse...

The community is the front line - they are the ones that have the capacity to stop it before it starts. The best way is to be alert to language - behaviours, patterns, prejudices or preferences towards negative bias can become automatic. Bringing it up in conversation by drawing attention to it, "You often say that, whatever made you feel that way?" Or perhaps call out behaviour, "That's not respectful" or "there is another way to discuss this." You may be able to say, "Wow, they are some strong opinions, have you spoken to a counsellor about that?" If we consider the way we interact, Ms

Knightsmith draws attention to the probability that we have made a choice and helped. She hopes that, "everyone that reads this can think of something that they can do or have done to make us a more resilient and kind community."

"Kindness is about not just going through the motions - It's about doing the best things for others because you want to - rather than just because you have to. It's about being genuine. Having compassion, respect and empathy for a situation. We all deserve and need kindness."

Breaking these habits are key to making changes in our communities. "Children are learning from us all the time - they learn these negative traits. It's about adults - the decision makers breaking the mould setting a better example."

When considering your own situation, sometimes we need to put ourselves in another's shoes - if a friend came to you and told the story that you are living, what advice would you give them?

Now has never been a better time to acknowledge awareness and cause change.

The Lismore digital campaign is designed to share stories on the website that celebrates the resilience of individuals and families who have experienced domestic and family violence.. You are invited to get involved, help share stories, celebrate resilience and healthy relationships as well as build awareness.

Lismoredomesticviolencecommittee.org.au

The images with this story are from the Love Bites initiative at secondary schools. A program designed to promote healthy relationships in young people. "After covid and floods interruptions, the program is hoping to be back in schools by the end of the year."

Lismore Domestic Violence Liaison Committee
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