

COMET ANNUAL TEA PARTY
SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AM
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
UNIVERSITY CLUB, 9TH AUGUST 2016

Good afternoon everyone thank you for inviting me to attend and speak at the annual Community Engagement Tasmania Society fundraising tea party.

It is a great pleasure for me to be here to support Comet, and I commend all of those involved for their efforts to help young people, and our most vulnerable young people in particular, to understand their rights and obligations under the law.

Charlotte Hunn, the founder, will no doubt explain to you how she came up with the idea of holding Criminal Law workshops at a young women's shelter and how the Sandy Duncanson Award in 2013 allowed her to develop this initiative.

Or perhaps Charlotte, deep in her postgraduate studies, is not going to talk about that at all and instead demolish Ashworth's argument that ignorance of the law is no excuse is a preposterous doctrine and argue that contrary to his view, the consequentialist arguments that support the doctrine are indeed persuasive.

It is so good to see that Comet is still going in 2016 and has in fact grown in its reach and professionalism. Now Mara House, Colony 47 and Annie Kenney are involved and this year the program has been extended to schools with a workshop on social media and the law for young leaders at New Town High, our only boys' public school in the state. An innovation last year was to employ a professional facilitator to train general representatives to run workshops and training days are held for this purpose.

The website is another new development and this has links to the National Children and Youth Law Centre's *'Lawstuff'* website; *Everyday Law*,

ThinkUknow, which is a guide to Internet safety and also to our home-grown *Girls Gotta Know* website set up by the Tasmanian Women's Legal Service. The content of *Girls Gotta Know* is broader than criminal law with really useful information on such topics as relationships, partying, housing and renting and money.

I have been particularly taken by the content of *Girls Gotta Know* under the relationships menu. This has submenus for sex, family and domestic violence and respectful relationships. The material under respectful relationships emphasises the importance of healthy and respectful relationships and explains that a healthy relationship is not about controlling or trying to change a person; and it sends the important message that it is never okay to physically, sexually or emotionally hurt a person, even if they tell you they love you afterwards.

This is so important when according to NCAS 2013 (the National Community Attitude Survey):

- 10% of respondents thought that if a woman doesn't physically resist, even if protesting verbally, it isn't really rape.

Surveys of young people in Australia, demonstrate that many young people don't really understand about respectful relationships, for example a survey conducted for *Our Watch* (a national body which is driving change to the culture and attitudes that underpin and create violence against women and children) found:

- 15% of young people believe it's important for women to allow men to make the decisions in the relationship;
- 20% of young people believe women should not compete with men in relationships; and
- 28% of young people think it is important for men to be tough and strong.

And the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS 2013) reported that:

- 28% of Australians think a woman prefers a man to be in charge of a relationship.

I should add that *Our Watch* has some really useful materials which can be used by young people to help end violence against women; it's worth a look by all law students.

So I would like to congratulate you all for your work and support for COMET. It is so good to see students demonstrating a social conscience by really putting themselves out to assist those less fortunate. There are huge pressures on students these days with so many of you needing to do casual work to at least partly support yourselves, and so devoting time to activities such as COMET is really to be commended. Your efforts will save many young people falling afoul of the ignorance of the law doctrine!

Thank you.