

**FAMILY VIOLENCE MEN'S EDUCATION PROJECT 2016
LAUNCH SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AM
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOBART, TUESDAY 26 APRIL 2016**

Good morning to you all.

Can I begin by acknowledging and paying respects to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community as the traditional and original owners and continuing custodians of this land.

Thank you Dr Lucas for inviting Dick and me to launch this report, 'Increasing Men's Awareness of the Effects on Children Exposed to Family and Domestic Violence'. I would like to congratulate the authors of the report, the University of Tasmania project team: Dr Peter Lucas, Dr Romy Winter, Dr Clarissa Hughes and Professor Kenneth Walsh for an excellent and thought-provoking report.

Clearly the project was not without its challenges! The original objective — of Identifying evidence-based resources to inform the development of a best practice training module describing how to educate men about the potential harms to children of exposure to family and domestic violence — was problematic because of the dearth of what works research on perpetrator programs. And there were other obstacles, such as the difficulty for commercial-in-confidence reasons of gaining access to the content of perpetrator programs and then the problem of being unable to recruit men who had participated in the Challenging Abusive Behaviour program run by Catholic Care.

Despite these setbacks, the authors have produced a beautifully researched and stimulating report.

Thanks are also due to the Salvation Army for their considerable assistance with the project and the Tasmanian Community Fund for a grant to support the project.

I am so glad to have the opportunity to have read the report and I will explain why. It is now accepted that Governors, as part of the community engagement aspect of Vice Regal duties, are free to choose particular issues of social justice to focus upon during their term. Sexual and family violence is one of the key issues I have chosen. This has meant that I do take any opportunity I can to talk publicly about this issue. And I get plenty of opportunities to speak publicly! So I will give you a few examples of when I have talked about sexual and family violence.

Last year I gave two public lectures in which I focused on this issue. The first was the annual Webber Ethics Lecture at The Hutchins School, for which I chose as my topic ethical relationships. Using a couple of confronting case studies of sexual violence, I tried to challenge the audience to think about how we could change the underlying cultural and social attitudes that allow such violence to happen. I explained that the sense of entitlement associated with the masculine gender role results in the use of violence by some men in intimate relationships, a sense of entitlement which can be accepted and legitimated in the wider community. And I suggested that a boys' schools such as Hutchins should ensure that they include in the curriculum age-appropriate respectful relationships programs, which comply with good practice models.

The need for respectful relationships training is a theme that is repeated a number of times in the report, which supports the Government's proposed Respectful Relationships Program and it is recommended that this include 'gender transformative' education programs.

After the Webber Lecture one member of the audience approached me and asked what he could do in his workplace at a large organisation. I suggested that he look into the White Ribbon Foundation's workplace accreditation program. Reading the 'Increasing Men's Awareness Report', I noted that there was criticism by some stakeholders of White Ribbon's initiatives as 'very tokenistic and corporate'.¹ At the same time stakeholders recognised the importance of the business sector as an avenue for raising men's awareness of domestic and family violence and its

¹ Page 48.

effects on children.² This I think highlights the importance of one of the recommendations of the report — for a Tasmanian ‘clearinghouse’ to provide current information about locally available services (as well as the latest research on the effects on children of exposure to family and domestic violence).³

Opening conferences is another thing a Governor does as part of the community role. In February this year I addressed the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists’ Scientific meeting in Launceston. They asked me to talk about the role of front-line health care services for vulnerable populations. I spoke of how pregnancy and the period following birth are a time of increased vulnerability to spousal violence and of the relationship between prenatal spousal abuse and postnatal trauma symptoms in a child. I made the suggestion that public hospitals in particular consider using a family violence screening device and perhaps routine screening together with introducing training for such screening.

Just two weeks ago when we visited the Launceston General Hospital I heard that the midwives were looking into using a family violence screening tool after hearing my presentation to the College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. I would like to follow this up by sending them a copy of your report, highlighting the section which makes recommendations in relation to ‘front line’ health professionals and the need for them to have a greater awareness of the latest evidence of the harms to children of exposure to family and domestic violence.⁴ Clearly, the recommendations that antenatal programs for fathers include gender equitable parenting and information in relation to the support services in relation the community for dealing with the range of emotions associated with becoming a father, are also relevant to this audience.

Personally I have learnt a lot from the report and it will be a very valuable resource which I will not only use but encourage others to read. Earlier I have said the report is thought-provoking. And it is. The criticisms of some

² Page 64.

³ Page 63.

⁴ Page 64.

stakeholders of the Sunday Tasmanian's 'Man Up' campaign as being a simplistic response that only serves to perpetuate harmful stereotypes of masculinity is an example. Its aggressive masculine imagery and the idea of 'manning up' which reinforces traditional masculinity were seen as counterproductive by these critics.

The report acknowledges the tensions that exist about focusing on perpetrator programs and the potential for these to be seen as an excuse for men's violence and scepticism about the ability of men who use violence to change. Because the report focuses on universal, whole of community interventions and selective more targeted interventions for men in particular, as well as specifically targeted perpetrator program, it avoids this criticism.

In conclusion, I would like to say that as Dick and I go about the community, we will keep in our minds ways of engaging men in the issue of the need to reduce family violence and we will endeavour to do so in a way that is gender transformative rather than reinforcing traditional and rigid gender roles.

Thank you.