



# Zonta International District 22

*Advancing the Status of Women Worldwide*

District 22 Governor, Judith Anderson, 1/49 Bellevue Tce, St Lucia Q 4067  
Ph: (h) 07 3871 3336 Email: [judith.a@optusnet.com.au](mailto:judith.a@optusnet.com.au)

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The Hon. Campbell Newman MP  
Premier of Queensland  
PO Box 15185  
City East Q 4002

Dear Premier

## **RE: FUNDING FOR DFV SHELTERS AND PROVISION OF LOW-RENTAL HOUSING**

I am writing as District Governor of District 22 of Zonta International – an international service organisation which has a primary focus of improving the legal, political, economic, educational, health and professional status of women (see [www.zonta.org](http://www.zonta.org)). Our organisation upholds CEDAW Articles 1-16, the Beijing Platform for Action 12 Critical Areas of Concern, and the Millennium Development Goals ( MDGs ) 3 and 5.

Zonta is now the only international women's organisation which focuses solely on status of women issues in accordance with CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women). As such, our organisation believes firmly in strengthening laws to prevent discrimination against women and the girl child, and we are constantly vigilant for opportunities to advocate for change or for new initiatives to promote our objectives.

I am writing to you about our concerns over the reduction of funding in your 2012-2013 Budget for specialist homelessness services, including crisis shelters for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV), as well as cuts to services which provide low-rental housing for these women (and their children) when they 'exit' a shelter. The additional services offered at these DFV centres which support their attempts to break the cycle of violence have also been adversely affected by these funding cuts.

Whilst we appreciate the budget constraints you have experienced, the reduction in the amount spent on social welfare, housing and other community services affects those least able to cope with the resultant reduced support.

***We are, therefore, requesting that in the 2013-2014 Budget you give consideration to increasing funding for domestic and family violence shelters, as well as providing low-rental accommodation assistance for persons on low incomes or social security benefits where they are in rental stress (i.e. where they need to spend more than 30 per cent of their available income after tax on rent).***

With respect to domestic and family violence services, we acknowledge that there have been positive moves by the government to:

- (i) amend the legislation (2012) to increase the safety of women and children and to hold perpetrators accountable; and
- (ii) launch the "Make the Call" campaign (Media releases from Minister Davis on 22 April and 1 May 2013) to raise awareness and to encourage people to overcome social barriers and to get help.

However, it seems incongruous to us that, at the same time that you are increasing awareness about DFV and ask that people report it and seek help, you have decreased expenditure which is much needed to assist these people to break the cycle of violence.

**There is a considerable ‘evidence base’ for increasing this funding, not just restoring it to its previous level, and we include the following notes:**

1. During the period 2006-2012, an average of 23 deaths per year in Queensland (or 44 per cent of all homicides) were linked to DFV (Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Unit, Office of the State Coroner).
2. 1 in 4 women experience physical abuse and/or sexual violence from their husband or intimate partner. Among women aged between 15 and 44 years, DFV causes more ill health and premature death than any other of the well-known risk factors (CEO Challenge, 2013).
3. In Queensland, police responded to 58,000 call outs for DFV in the 2011-12 financial year and, of the 42 homicides for that year, 19 were directly attributable to DFV. Police statistics also show that intimate partner homicide has increased. (Qld. Police Statistics, 2012).
4. DFV shelters provide only temporary accommodation for those fleeing violence, but the relative shortage of affordable (i.e. low-rent) housing is one reason that many of these women return to the home they left, or go into another relationship where they have a ‘roof over their head’.

Anglicare Australia’s recently released report on rental affordability shows that low income households (Newstart, Austudy, Youth Allowance) have virtually no hope of finding affordable accommodation. The report also shows that households with two minimum wages experience rental stress in Brisbane (Anglicare Report, 2013, p.47). Share accommodation (a single room sublet to a tenant) costs, on average, \$120 per week in Brisbane and such accommodation does not suit women with children.

5. Most of the women who seek refuge in shelters are those without any family support. They are, therefore, reliant on such shelters and on support to locate suitable rental accommodation if they are to have any hope of ‘breaking the cycle of violence’. DFV refuge personnel report that women can transit a shelter up to 5 times before deciding not to return to a violent partner. (Madonna House personnel, 2013).
6. Research shows that many women who are assaulted and abused do not seek help. These include:
  - Older women: Many over-50s suffer in silence; elder abuse is becoming a major problem for older people living independently, but escapes notice because it is defined differently from DFV; women in this age group and circumstance are not being given information about available DFV assistance; there appears to be little communication between professionals dealing with domestic violence and aged care.
  - Young women and girls: Many have complex issues including drug and substance abuse, poor ways of responding to authority, lack of parenting/life skills. Housing options are also very limited for this group of women.
  - Women with disabilities: Research shows that this group experiences high levels of abuse and has high levels of unmet needs in terms of access to services (Women With Disabilities Australia, 2013). Women with disabilities in Australia bear a disproportionate burden of poverty. The Disability Support Pension is inadequate and fails to take account of non-optional extra costs associated with disability. The right to adequate housing is a basic human need yet there is a lack of affordable, safe and secure housing for these women who can live independently. Even if they find affordable accommodation, they are often forced to live distant away from services as a result of low income and high rental costs – even in public housing.
  - Women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds. The cultural position of women in some migrant groups leaves them at risk and they tend not to access services because of fear of losing their family (children) and community support networks. Women who come to Australia under 457 visas with a male partner fear that they will be deported or lose their children if they suffer DFV and seek help. Similarly, women who have a temporary visa (a spouse visa) are reluctant to report DFV for fear that they will not be able to remain in Australia.
  - Rural and regional women. These women are often doubly disadvantaged because of a lack of DFV services in their area or a lack of suitable and affordable accommodation. There is also a reluctance to report violence due to the tyranny of distance, isolation, lack of transport, increased availability of firearms, financial insecurity, fears about confidentiality and community attitudes.

- Women in (remote) mining communities: These women are in a similar position to those in rural areas and some women from CALD backgrounds. There is now an extensive body of research (notably by Professor Barbara Pini) on community, gender and sexuality in mining communities. Mining communities contribute to DFV due to their location and operation with reported high levels of alcohol and drug abuse by mine workers, as well as inflated rents and house prices. Women who wish to escape this situation find it difficult as there are usually no direct DFV services in that location, there is no other 'safe' or affordable housing option in that location, and those who do manage to leave with their children are often forced to return to their partners or the mining community because of a court order stating that they cannot move away from their ex-partner with their children.

Addressing DFV and related homelessness requires a commitment from the federal, state and local governments to a long-term integrated approach to addressing the safety and security of women and their children. This means there is a need for a commitment to increasing the funding for addressing DFV, not only to maintain current levels of service, but also to address the unmet needs of the different groups of women described above.

We recognise that a recent federal government policy decision to transfer single parents with children aged over eight years from the Parenting Allowance to the Newstart Allowance has put stress on them and, consequently, on State government resources to deal with the need for low-rent accommodation. The effect of this change is that their previous income had reduced from \$499 to \$404 per week (i.e. \$95 or 19 per cent reduction) (Anglicare Australia, 2013, p.47). We are also requesting the Federal government to review this decision as the consequences of it are to further impoverish those who have to fund their own accommodation.

We would also ask that the funding for the Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service (TAAS), Queensland, be restored. Low income renters in the private rental market need 'support' in negotiating tenancy and rooming accommodation laws and in dealing with rent gouging. TAAS ensured that tenants knew their rights and responsibilities and their services to a reported 80,000 plus renting households will still be needed to a large extent. Those who are most in financial stress need services which can help them to try to live as independently as possible. The major finding in the Anglicare study on rental affordability was that the needs of low income renters are not being met by the private rental market. This market appears to be adapting to meet the needs of low income single renters only.

The State government has community responsibilities, including protection and support for those experiencing DFV and associated homelessness and affordable housing for those who qualify.

As stated above, government efforts to increase knowledge and to report DFV to and get help, must be accompanied by resources to meet an 'increased' need if the campaign is to be successful in real 'outcome' terms. In Queensland in 2012, of female clients seeking assistance re housing, 22.7% of them gave DFV as their main reason (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012, Cat. HOU 267). The demand for assistance for help with DFV and low-rental housing is, regrettably, not declining. We appeal to your government to step up and address these important issues by allocating sufficient funds to the relevant line items in your forthcoming budget.

Yours faithfully



JUDITH ANDERSON  
District Governor, District 22

16 May, 2013

CC to:

Hon. Tracy Davis, Minister for Communities, Child safety and Disability Services

Hon. Tim Mander, Minister for Housing and Public Works

Mrs Jo-Ann Miller, Opposition Whip, Shadow Minister for Health, Natural Resources and Mines, Housing

Ms Desley Scott, Deputy Opposition Whip, Shadow Minister for Disability Services, Community Services, Child safety, Multicultural Affairs and Women, Mental Health.