**CANDLELIGHT VIGIL – 7 MAY 2025**

**PANDANUS BEACH, WYNNUM**

**Thank you for the invitation to say a few words tonight and for the warm welcome to country from Aunty Beccy.**

**It is wonderful to see so many here tonight for this vigil and I thank Joan for again arranging it but also acknowledge that it is sad that we have to come together because this scourge of domestic and family violence continues to exist in our society.**

**As a member of the Zonta Club of Brisbane East Inc one of our major campaigns is for the Elimination of Domestic and Family Violence Against Women and Children however we also acknowledge that men may also be victims but in much few numbers.**

**There has been no reduction in the number of deaths annually of women and children across our country – figures indicate just under 4 women are killed per week – similar figures to previous years! This continues despite additional funding being made available along with the increased services now available – What more can be done? How can we as individuals and as a community do something? What can we do?**

**I look around tonight and see a wide cross section of our community here – our police who have to deal with the callouts for assistance – at a record high - students from our local schools, representatives from various service organisations, along with victim survivors. Why do we come - We come because we care but is that enough?**

**We hear of increasing numbers and I checked the statistics from the Queensland Courts website as updated on 10 April this year so thought some of the data would be of interest to you.**

**Statewide from 1 July 2024-31 March 2025 30,989 DVO applications were lodged. of these 16893 or 84.4% were lodged by police with the balance lodged privately (14.9) and 0.8% by the courts. Not unexpectedly 79.5% were lodged by females and 20% by males. Reasons were 72.1% because of intimate/personal relationships and 27.6% family.**

**In the first nine months of this current year 38405 protection, temporary protection or varying protection orders were made compared to 52999 during the full 2023-2024 year so on track yet for another increase this year.**

To date in 2024-2025 30% of all DVOs have been temporary protection orders made to protect the aggrieved until the application is finalised, 83% of DVOs protect a female aggrieved and 14% DVOs to protect an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

The Domestic and Family Violence Special Taskforce Report, “*N*ot Now, Not Ever” found non-fatal strangulation was a strong indicator for increased risk of harm and a key predictor of domestic homicide. Legislation was amended and came into effect in 2016 to create this as a stand-alone offence under the Criminal Code.

The statistics from 1 July last year to 31 March 2025 across Queensland Magistrates Courts show an increase by 13.5% in offences lodged (1019) compared to 1186 the previous full year. 867 of these were heard in the District Court and 7 in the Supreme Court resulting in 313 imprisonment/detention determinations and 10 probation orders

We all remember the horrible loss of Hannah Clarke and her three children. Resulting from this from the 26th of this month Coercive Control will be a criminal offence facing a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment due to the serious nature of the offence and the harm coercive control can cause victim-survivors. It will be illegal for an adult to use abusive behaviours towards their current, or former, intimate partner, family member, or informal (unpaid) carer with the intention to control or coerce them.

The criminal offence captures patterns of physical and/or non-physical abuse used to hurt, humiliate, isolate, frighten, or threaten a victim-survivor.

I have highlighted some alarming and disturbing statistics and is it then any wonder that our police spend so much of their time dealing with domestic and family violence callouts and the paperwork associated with these?

But what can we do? A few questions for you to ponder –

Why are the statistics still so high? –

Is it because of the greater awareness and the willingness of victims to come forward with some confidence that their story will be believed and that there are services available to assist them?

Are they more comfortable visiting a police station to report, be interviewed by a police officer who has received specialised training in D&FV and give their statement in a softer, safer special interview room now available in most police stations many of which I add have been furnished as a result of the Zonta “safe room” project?

Has the trial of placing specially trained Micah DV Support Officers in some police stations assisted police and the women?

Or is it that we the community are not doing enough to educate ourselves to have confidence to step up if we observe or know of instances of D&FV?

Are we raising our children to show respect and call out bullying and the like when they observe it?

Do we understand the language our young people use eg the emojis what do they all mean?

There are so many good programs and apps now available on-line or easily accessible to provide the skills to give each of us the confidence to step up and act without putting ourselves in danger. the four part series “Adolescence” available on Netflix although based on the English justice system it is a harrowing story of a young 13 year old boy arrested for murder of a female school colleague, the attitude of youth at the school he attended eg bullying and harassment, the influence of readily available social media eg Snapchat with inappropriate photos and emojis and the dilemma and anguish parents experience in trying to protect their children. The program is being widely spoken about and although quite distressing and slow at times is well worth watching.

Through my involvement in Zonta I am very aware of a school-based program which is evidence based, suitable for all students from Grades 7 through twelve and conducted in many of our schools. *“LoveBites*” is an interactive program which teaches young people respect and emphasises healthy relationships. It is one of many programs now developed and there are good Apps eg the “*Love and Learn*” free app readily available for free download. My personal belief is that we need to start with children long before they enter high school and hope that programs will be developed for use in primary schools and early education centres.

There are also excellent programs for perpetrators and well recognised bystander programs which acknowledge the role of the bystander recognising a potentially harmful situation and choosing to respond in a way that could positively influence the outcome.

These resources are readily available – we just need to make sure they are utilised and promoted.

**I have included a number of questions in speaking tonight and not a lot of answers – that is left to you to ponder and take action.**

**As we remember the women and children who have had their lives taken from them this past year, I would like to end with an Ode written by Carol Fuller a Zontian from Launceston, Tasmania titled *“Ode to the Lost”***

We sing of heroes of our wars.

Their bravery, their deeds and more.

But tonight, we see a different war.

Fought by women behind closed doors.

The women who live and die at home!

Killed by one who claimed to love them.

We speak of women who fight to survive,

Who keep their silence out of shame.

Who fight to protect their young and self

From those who claim to love them!

Their battle ground is no foreign land.

The ‘enemy’ is no foreign foe.

The place where we should all feel safe

Became their place of war.

The ‘enemy’ who dealt the blow

Was one who claimed to love them.

The children too know this war

Have heard the shouts and seen the sores

They wonder, “Is this how life is”?

Too young to know a better way.

And some, like mum, have passed away

Although he claimed to love them.

And as another week goes by

One more woman or child will die

Until we all unite to stop

This senseless war in homes.

 We come tonight to honour them

Those worthy of remembrance

And hope their plight might bring a change

In the hearts and minds of people.

Rest in Peace you voiceless ones

We keep this vigil just for you

We hope one day that your fate

Will see that justice can be done.
And all can live in safety.

Speech delivered by Ros Kinder at the Candlelight Vigil, Pandanus Beach, Wynnum 7 March 2025.