

## RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS TEACHING SUPPORT PROGRAM

### *Grievance*

**MS C.M. ROWE (Belmont)** [9.29 am]: My grievance today is to the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. It regards the tragic, complex, multifaceted and, sadly, widespread issue of domestic violence and what we can do from a primary prevention space. As members in this place will know, the statistics around domestic violence continue to be really shocking and persistent in our community right across Australia. We still see one woman die every single week in our country as a result of family and domestic violence. In Australia, 1.6 million women have experienced some form of family or domestic violence and WA has the second-highest rate in the country of reported physical and sexual violence perpetrated against women. These numbers are absolutely terrible in themselves, but when we put a name and a face to those numbers, it becomes even more tragic, more real and even more critical that we do something about it. These numbers represent our friends, our sisters, our mothers, our kids and our community. The impact of family and domestic violence is substantial and far-reaching and, tragically, it overwhelmingly affects women and children.

The research shows that children who are exposed to family and domestic violence experience long-term effects in their development, behaviour, health, relationships, emotional learning and thinking abilities. We have a real obligation here to challenge the factors that contribute to violence, particularly as our children are developing, so that we can break that cycle for future generations. Beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that excuse or support gender inequality and negative gender stereotypes are known as drivers of violence. I feel that this is evidenced quite clearly and incredibly disturbingly in an article titled “No jail for church camp rape” in *The West Australian*, which I read last week. A young woman, who was 18 at the time of the first attack, was raped at a church camp by her then boyfriend and then again the following year. It was in the presence of another person and both times occurred whilst she was asleep. The resulting impacts on her mental health and her life have been severe. In her victim impact statement to the court, she told how she had developed post-traumatic stress syndrome and attempted to take her life after the rapes. The lawyer for the male perpetrator made a big claim, saying that his client was “not a sexual deviant” but simply failed to understand consent. He continued —

“It’s out of character for the morals to which he was taught ... what he didn’t understand is exactly what consent was,” ...

“In hindsight, he realises what he has done is incorrect, but at the time, he was trying to encourage her to have consensual sex.”

I was horrified to read that someone could simply talk away an incident like rape and say that they just did not understand consent. It is disgusting. Disgracefully, the rapist escaped jail time and the young woman is left to piece back together her life in the aftermath of the trauma. From reading her victim impact statement, it is evident this has completely derailed her entire life. I raise this matter, minister, because it really demonstrates how far we have to go and the enormous amount of work we need to do to educate, I think, predominantly boys and young men in our community on the concept of consent. That is why I feel so passionately about the program that our government has funded, Respectful Relationships, which is a teaching program that is available to our state schools. This is a whole-of-school program that trains our teachers to promote a culture of equality and respect and to teach our kids about the importance of respectful relationships to prevent violence before it even starts. Research shows that this approach has the potential to provide widespread benefits, including reducing the incidence of bullying, violence and risk-taking behaviour; improved academic outcomes; and improved wellbeing and mental health capacity for people to seek help if they experience or witness violence. The list of benefits, certainly for young children, goes on.

I recently had the pleasure of catching up again with Leanne, who is the CEO of Starick Services. Its head office is in my community in Belmont. She and one of her staff members came to talk through in detail the Respectful Relationships program in WA schools. I know that the minister has a fantastic relationship with Starick and I know that she is very aware of the vital work it does to help women escape domestic violence in our community. In my electorate of Belmont, I continue to see the devastating and long-term impacts of family and domestic violence on victims. That includes homelessness, health risks, anxiety disorders and, of course, a significant financial impact. It impacts women from all walks of life. Their background or postcode does not matter; it seems to be something that can impact any demographic of women.

I have spoken previously in this place about Margaret Indich. She was a 38-year-old constituent of mine in Belmont. In January 2018, she was brutally bashed to death. She was in an 18-year relationship and it was tragic. I know her mother still experiences the trauma of that loss. I ask the minister to talk through what the state government is doing to address this terrible scourge in our community. Thank you.

**MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence)** [9.36 am]: I thank the member for raising these important matters in this house and for her passion and commitment to ensuring a safe and equitable community for women and girls and, in fact, everyone in Western Australia. I hope it goes

without saying that violence against anyone is unacceptable and we all have a responsibility to promote equal and respectful relationships as the norm.

As a government, we know that teaching young people about healthy and positive relationships is the best way to prevent violence before it starts. As the first Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence to be appointed in a Western Australian government, I can assure members and the WA public that we have stayed focused on working across the continuum to not only ensure that there is a proper, adequate and effective crisis response, but also stop the violence before it happens. We need not only good systems of response to ensure that perpetrators are held to account and justice is served after violence has happened, but also to prevent that violence occurring before it takes place. To that end, in 2019 we introduced the Respectful Relationships teaching support program in schools, as the member referred to. The program is delivered in primary and secondary schools in this state. It aims to create generational change and break the cycle of domestic violence before it starts. As the member said, it uses a whole-of-school approach to support staff in public schools to deliver material within the context of the curriculum aimed at respectful relationships to give teachers the skills to support students to build relationships characterised by nonviolence, equality, mutual respect and trust. It is delivered in partnership between the Department of Communities, the Department of Education and Starick Services.

We know that in the formative years of schooling, young people are likely to have their first experiences of intimate partner relationships. This means that supporting and educating students is critical in helping them foster respectful relationships. To date, 22 schools have completed the program, with another 16 currently in progress in the final intake of schools during the pilot program, which ends in mid-2022. As part of our last state election commitments, we committed to another \$1.4 million to expand the program to another 12 schools in 2022. As the member for Belmont pointed out, education can be an important tool to help young people better understand the concept of consent. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority is currently reviewing the national curriculum to include a review of the health curriculum with particular considerations for consent and relationships in education. We anticipate that it will include greater consent and relationships education, and we look forward to that. Although these measures are important, we also cannot rely solely on the school curriculum. Everyone has a role in calling out poor behaviour and educating those around us.

Since 2017, when we came to office, we have committed over \$120 million to breaking the cycle of abuse and providing better outcomes for those experiencing family and domestic violence in our state. Our achievements last term included significant law reform and building two new women's refuges and two new FDV one-stop hubs. We continued this term with other measures, including a \$29.5 million Safe Home, Safe Family package, funding safety planning and securing upgrades for women to stay safe in their own homes, supporting rapid rehousing and supporting women in private or public housing. There is a \$14.2 million law reform package to support victim/survivors in court processes and a new supporting survivors package of \$4 million to include initiatives such as paid driving lessons and dental treatments.

As the Minister for Women's Interests, I know all too well that sexual violence is nothing new. We have all watched as it impacts all parts of our society and industries, from mining to politics. We are now seeing that women and men will no longer tolerate sexual violence and sexual harassment. This government continues to work to empower people to share their stories and report sexual violence and harassment, because no-one should suffer in silence. Last month we announced that we are commissioning the state's first sexual violence prevention strategy. I announced that in concert with the Attorney General and the Minister for Health. That project will review sexual assault laws, hold offenders to account and focus on primary prevention to reduce sexual violence and harassment in our society. Another key initiative that we introduced was our 16 Days in WA to Stop Violence Against Women campaign. Now in its fifth year, the campaign aims to promote community action to address violence against women and drive change that promotes equality and respectful relationships. I encourage the member for Belmont and all members of this house to show support for this campaign from 25 November to 10 December. The point of the campaign is to say that we all have a role in educating ourselves about violence and harassment against women and girls in our society and to encourage those in our community and electorate to take up this campaign.

I thank the member for Belmont for raising this important issue. I know that we still have a way to go, but this government is committed to drawing a line in the sand and ensuring our state is a safe place for girls, women and everyone.