

NSW REMEMBRANCE QUILT UNVEILING

May 6th Jubilee Room NSW Parliament House

Speech given by Ms Betty Green, Convener NSW Domestic Violence Coalition

Minister for Women Ms Jodi McKay MP, distinguished guests, Assistant Commissioner Mr. Mark Murdoch NSW Police Force, Ms Alex Shehadie Acting Executive Director Office for Women's Policy, colleagues and friends it is with great pleasure I welcome you here today on behalf of the NSW Domestic Violence Coalition for the unveiling of the NSW Remembrance Quilt.

Before we begin the proceedings, I would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, to Elders past and present; the Gadigal people of the Eora nation.

Today is an important day following on from National Remembrance Day to stop, reflect on and remember the women, children and men who have died because of domestic violence.

A man identified as the victim's partner contacted Emergency Services and stated, 'that the woman was unconscious after falling onto a lounge and hitting her head and nose'. The woman was conveyed by ambulance to hospital in a critical condition with major head injuries, the woman later underwent surgery to relieve significant pressure in her brain. The accused man was interviewed by police and admitted to grabbing and shaking the woman during an argument. The woman died from severe head trauma, numerous bruising and abrasions. The accused was formally charged with the murder of the woman. An application for bail was refused and he was remanded in custody.

A young woman and mother of two children shot dead before her ex partner turned the gun on himself. Both young children witnessed the offender put the gun to the head of their mother and then himself. There was a documented history of violence including a charge for assault and breach AVO. The victim believed that she was being stalked and was fearful of her estranged partner. At court the police advised the magistrate that the offender not be released however, he was freed by the court despite breaking an AVO which should have protected her. The offender was not the children's biological father and they are currently in the care of family.

A 47-year-old woman was found sitting on the edge of the bed. She was not breathing and foam was coming from her mouth. The woman's partner called an ambulance and said she was choking on something. The hospital staff found injuries consistent with a serious assault including 5 fractured ribs and an injury to her wrist. Police interviewed her partner who denied ever hitting the victim. Later medical staff informed police that her injuries included; 5 fractured ribs, fractured hyoid, fractured larynx and fractured sternum. The doctor told police that the injury to her hyoid and larynx were consistent with strangulation. The woman remained on life support until she was declared brain dead. The offender was charged with murder.

These are just some of the stories of women who perished at the hands of their intimate partners in New South Wales in 2006. There are others whose deaths are reported in media and there are many more whose deaths go unreported and unnoticed.

The observance of National Remembrance Day acknowledges publicly the domestic violence deaths of women, children and men. Traditionally observed in Queensland for the past 20 years as part of their domestic violence awareness month, since 2009 activists and advocate representatives from across the nation believed it was important that there be a national observance. Where communities could come together and remember.

We know the killing of women by their intimate partners is not an occasional occurrence or a phenomena that happens once in a while

- In the United States approximately 1400 women die in domestic violence annually (Websdale & Wilson 2006)

- In the United Kingdom 2 women are murdered each week by a current or former partner. (Home Office UK National Domestic Violence Plan 2005)
- Almost half the femicides in the world are committed by a current or former partner or boyfriend (WHO 2002)
- The National Homicide Monitoring Program indicates that approximately 76 women are killed annually by their intimate partner.
- In NSW we learnt that over a 5 year period from January 2003- June 2008 that of the 215 victims of domestic homicide 42% were intimate partner, and of that 70 were female victims.

Overview of Project

The Remembrance Quilt Project was born from discussions in Adelaide as we prepared for the next day's forum "Reducing Family Homicide: Learning from Loss" that was held at Flinders University in 2009.

It became very clear to us that not only did we not know the exact numbers of women and children dying as a result of domestic homicide there was also nothing to publicly acknowledge the terrible impact that such fatalities have on families, the broader community and in particular the community of front line workers who have in many cases had in depth contact with women and their children escaping domestic violence.

Domestic Homicide leaves a long lasting legacy on affected families and communities that resonates down through generations. In my own circle I have a close friend who each time a domestic violence homicide is reported in the media she will relate the story of her husbands' sister callously shot dead by her ex-partner as she opened her front door some years before.

The concept of the Remembrance Quilt was to provide an opportunity for women, women's groups and domestic violence services to create a Quilt Block that represented their thoughts, ideas and feelings around domestic violence deaths of women and their children.

The Remembrance Quilt would contain the stories of women, community and families affected by domestic violence, domestic violence fatalities.

Each state would develop their own unique Remembrance Quilt.

To date NSW, South Australia and Queensland have completed Remembrance Quilts. It is our hope that in the coming year we will bring together all the Remembrance Quilts.

Over the past several months women's groups and services have been busy creating their Quilt Blocks and incorporating their stories.

The Quilt Blocks have come from diverse communities and places to make up what is a vibrant and poignant reminder to all of us, to all of community- the toll and the impact of domestic violence fatalities.

From Ballina in the Northern Rivers region to Bega in the south, in regional centres, in small community centres, refuges and women's services, our education centers and private homes women have been working on the quilt blocks you see today

The blocks have been created by

- women survivors of domestic violence
- women who have lost female family members and friends
- communities that have lost children
- agencies that have worked with and supported women who have been killed in the context of domestic violence

Participants in making quilt blocks have included

* a woman in her 70's whose husband in his 80's recently attempted to kill her by smashing her head and face repeatedly with the lid of a cast iron pressure cooker

* a woman whose current partner was in a previous relationship with a male and 8 years before he killed her 5 year old daughter and then himself

*a women with 2 children whose partner attempted to strangle her to death in front of the children in 2009.

The symbols of flowers and candles were chosen by one service as they are associated with grief and loss

The red roses in the centerpiece are of special significance in New South Wales since 2006 and are associated with NSW Domestic Violence Coalition's campaign to draw attention to the domestic violence deaths of women and children in that state. The Red Rose was chosen for a number of reasons- it powerfully represents the dynamic of abuse in intimate relationships, it is most often the flower given to women as a token of "love and affection" and in expressions of apology and is also associated with mourning.

We acknowledge and thank the women and children who have contributed to the creation of the Quilt Blocks.

This has been an unfunded project- we thank the women and women's services who have supported the Remembrance Quilt Project by supplying the materials for the quilt blocks and have also incorporated the project into their existing programs

We are indebted to the talent and patience of Vicky Allen who has skillfully sewn the quilt blocks together to form this beautiful yet moving Quilt.

It is pleasing that the Remembrance Quilt will be on display in Parliament House from today until the 21st May.

From there The Quilt will make its way across the state for display.

Thank you