

Criminal action against violence

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DOMESTIC and family violence is being viewed less as a civil matter and more of a criminal matter, according to the Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service community development manager Thelma Schwartz.

Speaking at the 12th Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Prevention Forum held in Mackay yesterday and Wednesday, Ms Schwartz said this shift in community attitudes had come after former Governor-General Quentin Bryce's Special Task Force report in 2014.

"We've had a raft of legislative changes," Ms Schwartz said.

"There's been an increase in penalties, offenders are looking at spending more time in jail and there's been a stronger penal response to people who break the law."

Ms Schwartz said Queensland was leading the charge to raise awareness and prevent domestic and family violence.

"At this stage Parliament has promised to implement some of the 200 recommendations from the report," she said.

One of those recommendations is a stand alone trial in a special domestic violence court

dedicated to domestic violence applications and hearings, which is being trailed in Southport.

"We're hoping to see that model adopted across the state."

Ms Schwartz believes domestic and family violence is a major issue in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Queensland.

"People feel shame talking about domestic and family violence, especially in indigenous communities,

because it's so normalised," she said.

Ms Schwartz said there also was a lack of appropriate shelters in remote and rural areas for those affected by domestic and family violence.

FOR HELP

If you or someone you know is affected by family violence:

- National DV hotline – 1800RESPECT or 1800 737 732
- Qld DV Connect – 1800 811 811
- Domestic Violence Service Mackay Region (DVRS)
- Neighbourhood Centre on George St.
- Women's Centre on Shakespeare St.
- In an emergency, Phone 000