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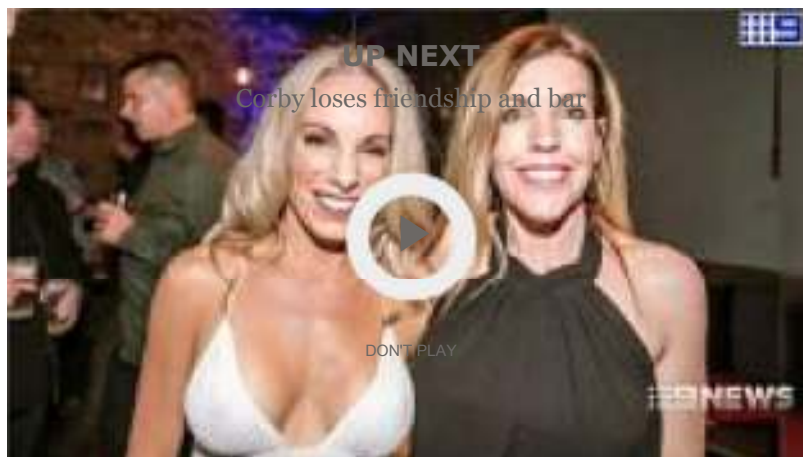
Gold Coast domestic violence: 'The floodgates are open'

Tony Moore

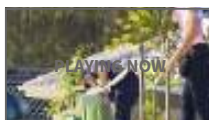
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Three years ago the Gold Coast Community Legal Centre in Southport dealt with 60 domestic violence cases. In 2016 that number was 890.

That is not just a tripling, or a quadrupling, or a 10-fold increase in domestic violence reports on the Gold Coast. It is a 14-fold increase in people asking for help to escape domestic violence.



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Children have escaped unharmed from a Pimpama house where a man and a woman were found dead on Tuesday morning. *Nine News*

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Overall in 2016 the Gold Coast Community Legal Service dealt with 2000 domestic violence inquiries. That is how many people came to their Southport office looking for help with domestic violence last year alone.

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There were 3548 applications for protection orders from domestic and family violence in the Southport Domestic Violence Court.

That is 10 women (mostly) looking for protection each day, every day, the court is open.



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There were 2668 charges linked to domestic and family violence laid by police.

On 1648 occasions a domestic violence order was "breached".



There has been a fourteen-fold increase in the reporting of domestic violence on the Gold Coast, according to figures from community legal aid centres. Photo: Jorge Branco

In other words, 1648 times last year anger drove a person (most often a man) to give the law the flick and physically or verbally harass, or strangle or bash a partner or former partner.

That is the terrifying scenario Gold Coast woman Teresa Bradford faced early on Tuesday morning. Her friends [say the system failed her](#).

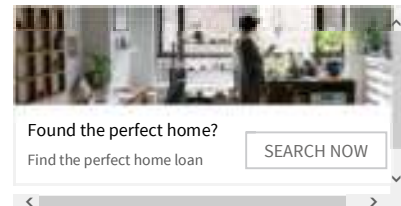
As Gold Coast Legal Service director Victoria Shiel says, the increase in reporting domestic violence is "staggering" and the cases, "horrific".

The numbers alone tell the story of domestic violence on the Gold Coast.

In 2014, one in 12 people who approached the Gold Coast Community Legal Service wanted help with domestic violence or family violence.

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In 2015, it was "one in 10 and in the period from January 2016 to January 2017, it was one in three.

"There has been so much media and attention on domestic and family violence that people feel safer to report," she said.

"And I guess what we are dealing with on the Gold Coast is that the floodgates are now open with people feeling safer to report domestic violence."

Ms Shiel repeated the sad, commonly told stories that people involved in domestic violence were often experiencing homelessness, assault and parenting difficulties.

In 2014 they dealt with 60 actual domestic violence cases.

"Last year it was 890 cases," Ms Shiel said.

That meant more work at the new Southport domestic violence court.

"So the important thing is that those figures are more a reflection of the shift in our resources," she said.

The centre now has two solicitors who deal exclusively with domestic and family violence issues.

Ms Shiel is aware of the rumours that the federal government may cut funding by one-third to community legal centres around Australia at the June 2017 budget.

The Gold Coast Community Legal Service received \$488,000 from the Federal Government and \$221,000 from the Queensland Government for 2016-17, Ms Shiel said.

"The thought of us losing resources is just frightening for us because we are not meeting the demand as it is now."

Federally, the Labor Party and The Greens say the federal LNP will cut "funding to community legal centres, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services and Legal Aid offices by 30 per cent by July 1, 2017.

However in Brisbane in October 2016 when Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull attended a COAG meeting to address domestic violence and committed to \$100 million to target domestic violence.

That included \$20 million for early intervention programs to break domestic and family violence, \$25 million for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family violence programs and \$30 million for frontline legal services dealing with domestic and family violence.

People seeking assistance can contact DV Connect Womensline on 1800 811 811 or the Mensline on 1800 600 636.

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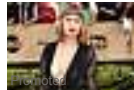
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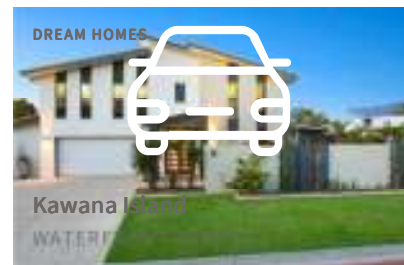
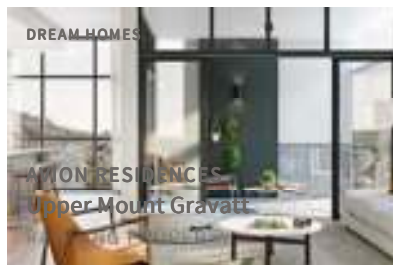
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