

Secure space for DV victims

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A LONG-AWAITED secure waiting room at the Ayr Court House for domestic violence victims has been completed and is now operational.

Victims will have access to the safe room while awaiting their trial, meaning they will not have to sit in the same room as their abuser.

The project was initially approved last year, and various organisations have come forward to praise the move.

Anne Lewis, director of the North Queensland Women's Legal Service welcomed the news that the safe room facility was being established.

"A safe room is essential for women attending court for domestic or family violence

matters. Women often feel anxious or intimidated at the prospect of facing the person who has used violence against them when they have to attend

court," Ms Lewis said.

"A space of safety, support services and access to free legal advice and representation in the courtroom are crucial to achieving better outcomes for women seeking a Protection Order."

National organisations Life Without Barriers and White Ribbon Australia have also supported the space.

"The purpose of the room is to separate the victims of domestic violence from the aggressive and intimidating behaviour of the perpetrators when they attend court," Life Without Barriers representative Maggie McKeown said.

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"It is also a way for the victims of domestic violence to understand that they are not alone and it can help the victims to support each other in a safe environment." CEO of White Ribbon Australia Libby Davies also supported the movement for the secure room.

"Survivors of domestic violence suffer prolonged trauma through emotional, psychological and/or physical abuse," Ms Davies said. "A woman awaiting trial in a secure room rather than in the courtroom will assist minimise further intimidation and re-traumatising that can take place if both parties are in the same space, including extended family. These rooms represent in court safety measures critical to delivering justice."

The North Queensland Women's Legal Service solicitor travels to provide a free legal advice clinic on the first Wednesday of each month at the Burdekin Community Association. Women can access free legal advice at any other time by way of a phone appointment, a Skype appointment, calling the Legal Advice Line on 1800 244 504 or by visiting the Townsville office. For more details on how to access free legal advice call 4772 5400 or visit the website at www.nqwlsl.com.au.

Pictured: Burdekin MP Dale Last, depositions clerk Robbyn Gee, Life Without Barriers' Alison Johnstone and relieving manager Rosa Sandre in the newly operating domestic violence safe room at the Ayr Court House.

