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Leading DV support service: ‘increase in threats’ since Hannah’s death

The death of Brisbane’s Hannah Clarke and her three children last month has sparked an increase in “you’re next” threats a leading DV support agency says, as calls for help escalate.

Andrea Macleod, Caboolture News

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WLSQ says more women are reporting increased fear and threats since the death of Brisbane mother Hannah Clarke and her three children. Photo. supplied.

One of the State’s largest domestic violence support services has reported an increase in the number of women reporting they’ve been told “you’re next” following the horrific deaths of Hannah Clarke and her three children last month.

Women’s Legal Service Queensland (WLSQ) CEO Angela Lynch confirmed women from across the State were reporting an increase in personal fear and reporting of threats from perpetrators stating “you’re next”.

Ms Lynch said the elevated level of fear and concern of women highlighted the urgent need for changes to the judicial system and laws to protect victims of domestic violence and an increase in funding for community services.

“Like everywhere services in Caboolture are overburdened. We can’t meet demand,” Ms Lynch said.

“Caboolture is a region where there is a lot of vulnerability and economic disadvantage and .. we work with a lot of First Nations’ women and issues in those communities.”

Ms Lynch said the specialised Federal Government funded High Risk Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) was undertaking really important work across the region.

“It is a small unit and there’s lots of work we meet capacity really quickly,” she said.

She said an ever-present number of clients raised issues relating to being tracked by their perpetrator “and that becomes a real red flag for concern in relation to the client’s safety”.

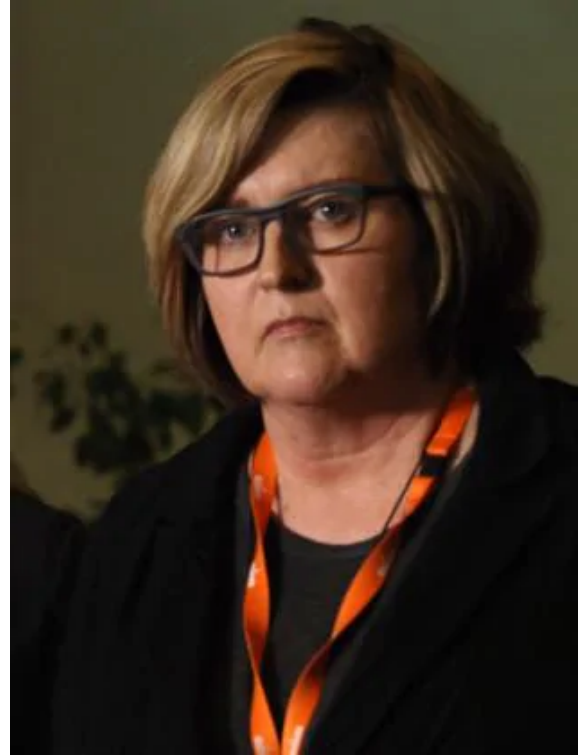
Ms Lynch said one of the risk factors for murder in a domestic violence setting was stalking.

Since Hannah’s death, she said “increasingly women are reporting that what has happened to Hannah has alerted them to the danger they are in”.

“Women are self-reflecting on their own situation and realising they are in fact in danger and that just increases the anxiety,” Ms Lynch said.

“A lot of women, in order to be able to carry on in their day to day existence suppress the dangers or don’t recognise them because the levels of danger are so much a part of their existence they can’t objectively identify them ... but with all the talk in community there is an OMG moment that this is my life ... my life is being

controlled and regimented and a realisation the lives they are living are not normal”.



Women's Legal Service Queensland CEO Angela Lynch.
Picture Gary Ramage



Hannah Clarke and her son Trey were killed by her estranged husband in Camp Hill last month. Photo: Facebook

Ms Lynch said the “scale of the crisis and the brutality of the murder of Hannah and her children requires and emergency response to improve safety”.

“This is not something that can fix itself nor something that can wait for yet another inquiry,” she said.

“There are three immediate priorities that should form the basis of the urgent response including legislation to remove the presumption of equal shared parental responsibility and create emphasis on safety in the Family Law Act 2.

“Establishment of a family law system domestic violence death review process to understand and prevent family law deaths and restore and build funding to specialist legal services with the aim that calls for help don’t go unanswered.”

The Australian Government announced the WLSQ funding for the Caboolture high risk DVU in 2018.

Figures released at the time of the announcement showed Caboolture had “long been identified as a domestic violence hot spot’ with an increasing rate of domestic violence order (DVO) applications (772 in 2016/17) and DVO breaches increasing to 1738 in 2016/17.

The DVU consists of a specialist casework lawyer, social worker, paralegal, and health justice partnership lawyer to see clients at the Caboolture and Redcliffe hospitals.

WLSQ Helpline: 1800 957 957