



# MANNING DISTRICT EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION COMMITTEE INC

PO Box 237 TAREE NSW 2430

**Mission Statement:**

To co-operatively promote social justice through safety, equity and access for women, children and families, including all those at risk of violence and homelessness.

Address all correspondence to "The Secretary"

7 August 2003

House of Representatives Standing Committee  
on Family and Community Affairs

Submission No: **438**

Date Received: **7-8-03**

Secretary: .....

Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs  
Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry  
Department of the House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee

This letter is a submission to the Committee's Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry.

- a) Given that the best interests of the child are the paramount consideration:-
- (i) What other factors should be taken into account in deciding the respective time each parent should spend with their children post separation, in particular whether there should be a presumption that children will spend equal time with each parent and, if so, in what circumstances such a presumption could be rebutted; and

I have been Manager of the Women's Refuge in Taree for 13 years. It is my experience that those parents who separate and resolve issues around time spent with their children without recourse to a Court are functional and unlikely to be wracked by domestic violence.

This Refuge deals on a daily basis with many tragically impaired children – boys modeling their father's behaviour from as young as 4 years old – abusive behaviours may be generational – children learn what they see.

In those situations requiring resolution by a Court it is tragically probable that an abusive male is involved.

I advise you that many clients to our Refuges support services which include an on-site domestic violence counselor come from a broad socio-economic groups. I could name many abusive husbands/partners in this town from the medical, legal, education, trade and business sectors.

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Four women in the Manning/Great Lakes LGA have been murdered in the last 18 months by their husbands/partners. Surviving children are traumatised for life.

Failing to comprehend, and thus exacerbating the insidious and terrifying effects of domestic violence on child witnesses is a probable outcome of a presumption that children will spend equal time with each parent.

This organisation is opposed to any presumed division of children of separated parents.

- ii) In what circumstances a court should order that children of separated parents have contact with other persons, including their grandparents.

In the experience of Refuge staff, the families of abusive men consistently fail to insist that the perpetrator take responsibility for his actions. In fact the family is likely to support the perpetrator (after all – he has, in all likelihood learned his behaviours at his parents knee) and further victimise the abused wife and her children. Of course this leads to the exacerbation of damage to the children of such families.

Many children witnessing domestic violence experience family life as terrifying.

For these reasons this organisation does not support an automatic right of access or contact of children of separated parents to other persons including grand parents.

Please note the following: -

This women's Refuge sees at first hand as well as by referral, the dreadful scars left on children raised in a domestic violence "war zone" with fathers who frequently act out their own abusive childhoods in their own family. They do not appear to take responsibility to break the cycle.

We attempt to address the effects in the following ways: -

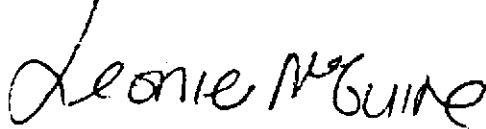
- Taree Refuge/Manning Great Lakes Area Command Partnership Against Domestic Violence – 4 welfare workers managed by the Refuge – based at Taree Police. The only Refuge in Australia with such a level of partnership.
- The only Refuge in NSW to have an in-house counsellor and trainee Koori addressing the traumatic effects of domestic violence on women and children.
- A specialist Children's Service interacting directly with local schools to deliver programs to child witnesses to domestic violence. The children's Refuge program also has developed programs for 0-5 years child witnesses to domestic violence.

We run weekly Women's Groups and endeavour to empower women to reject violence. Many of our women go on to TAFE, University and employment. These outcomes are not possible in violent homes.

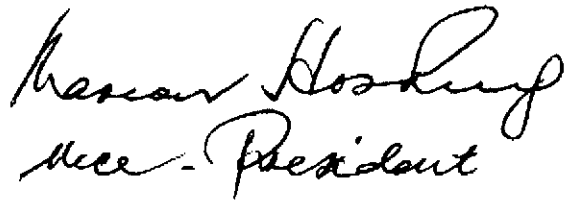
I am issuing you – the committee – an invitation to send a representative to this Refuge to see directly the work we do. We will organise a luncheon. We will also invite The Hon Mark Vaile MP (Minister for Trade) other stakeholders and women who will be directly affected by this decision.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



Leonie McGuire  
Manager

  
Marion Hosking  
Mee - President

Attachments: Document showing effects on children (at various developmental stages) of domestic violence.

"Lezzos on the Hill" Marion Hosking from the chapter "What does happen to the children".

lm.jt

## AGE RELATED EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

Children are profoundly affected by living in a home where domestic violence occurs. The effects vary according to the age of the child.

### 0-6 years

- sleeping problems, nightmares
- regression to earlier stages of functioning
- lack of attachment/ bonding
- separation anxiety
- aggressive behaviour or conduct problems
- children in the 3-5 year age group have more behaviour problems than other age groups due to their inability to identify and express their feelings, their increased dependence on their parents

### Primary School Age

- feel responsible for parent's behaviour
- Acting-in behaviour;**
- withdrawn, passive, clingy,
  - anxious
  - depressed
- Acting-out behaviour;**
- poor impulse control
  - aggressive disruptive behaviour
  - lying, cheating, stealing
  - poor attendance concentration
  - decreased academic performance
  - low self esteem & social competence
  - some children develop pseudo maturity

### Adolescents

- immature peer relationships
- poor self image
- adjustment problems
- females may become angry at their mother's powerlessness and develop a distrust of men
- some develop close contact with adults outside the family or rely on peers and their family

#### Acting-out behaviour

- violence and aggressive behaviour
- social deviance/ truancy
- sexual promiscuity/ drug use

#### Acting-in behaviour

- dependency/ helplessness
- depression/ anxiety
- isolation and social withdrawal
- self destructive behaviour