

* THIS NARRATIVE INCLUDES DESCRIPTIONS OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AND ABUSE. *

The insight component of [Insight Exchange](#) shares a person's **lived experience** of violence and abuse, highlighting a person's responses and resistance to violence and where '**social responses**' were helpful, unhelpful or harmful. This reveals the roles that individuals, organisations and communities play in people's experience of violence.

JULES

They dismissed the injuries I sustained, the holes in the walls and just focused on his mental health. They told me and my children that we were "good people who had to nurture him". The Police told us that, friends and family told us that, hospitals told us that.

I would like someone else to read this story and have a sense of confidence, courage and belief that things can get better. I want there to be greater understanding about the intersection between mental health and domestic violence. Ultimately, I want people to recognise it is possible for a person to have a mental illness and be violent and, in these situations families need support.

In my situation my ex-partner Jed, had Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD). I knew the whole array of trauma he had endured as a child living with perpetrators of domestic violence. While this may explain, it does not excuse what he did to me or my family. However, whether it was the Police, hospital or mental health services, what he did to us didn't matter, they just excused his behaviour as "He has 'mental health issues'". They dismissed the injuries I sustained, the holes in the walls, the fear we endured and just focused on his mental health needs. We were irrelevant. My children and I were told that we were "Good people who *had* to nurture him". We heard this from the Police, hospitals, doctors, his family and friends. Never was he held accountable for his behaviour or violence.

When I met Jed, I was working fulltime, independent and very happy. Jed was living in a tent, homeless, with his child, Stevie. After an incident in the caravan park where they were sleeping, I said to Jed "It's not safe for your kid to be living in a tent, come and stay at my house while you get a rental property". He agreed, and things were okay for a while. Like most new couples, we had a blissful, happy, amazing few months. Things seemed good and we seemed to be very aligned. I finally thought I'd found someone who had the same hippie dreams as me. I wanted to live off grid and I wanted to give back to society and I thought I had I found someone who actually believed in these ideas too. While everyone else thought I was this crazy chick who wanted to chuck in the corporate life and go live off-grid, he believed in me and said he would help me achieve my dreams. So, believing him I bought land. This was always my investment. The land was in my name. Everything seemed fine, but it was almost the day I signed for the land that his behaviour changed.

Through my connections I was able to get Jed a rental property and fully furnished this. However, he still kept staying at my place, saying being around me helped his mental wellbeing. Within weeks, I was paying for everything. He would tell me Stevie had needs that I was expected to pay for. He would say if I loved him and Stevie then I would buy Stevie as much I did for my other children. The whole relationship, he expected me to prove that he mattered and he decided how I needed to show that.

It didn't matter how appallingly he treated me or the kids. He would say the cruellest and most hurtful things to me and expect that all be forgotten, by stating it was his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He would say "I don't remember any of that. I don't know that I would have done that." If I could prove this he would say "Okay, well, if that's what you say. But that's not who I am. That was PTSD".

The kids and I would refer to that side of him as "the monster". There was the guy that we cared about and the monster - the monster was the "PTSD version". They were two different bodies. We all learned how to look out for the monster. I would talk to the children about all signs the monster was coming like his eyes going yellow, his breath smelling metallic, his posture changing. We would reflect on the signs and changes we saw afterwards. While he was admitted in hospital, I would be home with the children asking "What did you notice? What did you see? Do you remember he did this? I would explain that when he circles around on the same topic, it would mean he was fixating on something which would escalate to an episode. I put in so much effort to learn about C-PTSD and PTSD. I joined PTSD support groups, met with psychologists, talk to every doctor, I went to every appointment. I did all this just to try to understand what the "triggers" were, so that I didn't set him off. I wanted to know how I could keep him safe from hurting himself and keep my children safe.

We had all these strategies for when we would see these changes in him. When the monster appeared we knew we needed to get him out of the house, find and give him his medication. But his temper got to the point where I never wanted the children alone with him. He never had episodes during the day. It would always be at night, often very late at night. He would be drinking, then go out and be driving

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erratically. He would send me photos of street signs at two o'clock in the morning, claiming he almost crashed, saying he wanted to die, always over something he believed I said or felt. I would be terrified. I would be googling street signs, trying to work out where he was and driving the streets all night until I could find him. Then I would be expected to go to work without sleep and look after the children and household while he slept to recover from the "PTSD episode".

One of my daughters openly resisted his actions and excuses. She did not like the way he was treating me or her siblings. Jed knew she didn't like him. He would yell and scream and eventually gave me an ultimatum, either she has to move out and live with her father, treat him the way he expected - or he was leaving. But if he was to leave that would mean that he would have nothing left to live for. So, I either had to choose my daughter or be responsible for him taking his life. Before I made the choice, my daughter chose to move

out. By this time, Jed's "PTSD episodes" became more frequent. His language got worse. He started sending abusive texts and became more aggressive and demanding.

In the time we were together Jed had multiple suicide attempts. The first one was only a month after I got the land. Jed overdosed on his PTSD medication. Another time, he stepped in front of a car, but only just far enough that only the side mirror hit him. Sometimes he would drive erratically and drive into a tree. In hindsight, I realised that all the attempts were designed to look like serious attempts without endangering his life. But, at the time, I didn't know that. If I didn't do what he wanted or if the kids didn't behave as he wanted, he would have these "PTSD episodes" and attempt to kill himself. This became so frequent that we just stopped being ourselves, we were not doing or saying what we wanted to for fear we would cause him to feel this way. It became the ultimate control.

On one occasion he was in a bad state, I can't even remember why he was mad at me, but he was yelling, "I hate you. You're horrible. I'm going to make you suffer for the rest of your life". I only had the youngest child home at the time. I have trained in martial arts, even though he was 110kg, and I am 70kg, he had never succeeded in hurting me because I had always been able to bring him to the

One of the cops started rubbing my daughter's shoulder and said "You're such a good person, standing by him. You really are. You need to keep doing that..."

ground. So, on this occasion, he had a kitchen knife and was threatening to cut himself, and I was able to disarm the knife from him. Then he grabbed a hammer, followed by a screw driver. Again, I disarmed him. I then moved him out of the house to the yard and he grabbed the kitchen knife again and started threatening to stab himself yelling "I'm going to do it in the front yard, so you will remember this forever. You will never look at your house without this memory". I ran back inside and called the Police. At this point I am trying to keep him out of the house while trying to stop my daughter from going to him. He was kicking the front door to get to me, while I was on the phone begging the Police to hurry up, crying "You've got to get here. He's going to hurt himself". I was terrified that he was going to hurt himself or get

into the house and turn the knife on me and this would happen in front of my daughter. Four Police cars arrived, initially. They called for more and a negotiator. In the end there was something like 12 Police standing in my front yard. The negotiator was trying to calm him down, asking "What's going on? Talk to me about it". This must have lasted about 45 minutes of him just screaming at the top of his voice. My neighbours were videoing and people came out and watched. He was yelling about how I am a horrible a person and I had done this deliberately this to him. Telling the Police that I am always insulting and putting him down, and I was trying to break him so he would kill himself. In the end, the Police officer asked, "Well, what do you want?" Jed said, "I just want her to love me. I just want her to come out and give me a hug". He then dropped the knife and collapsed on the lawn. I don't know if he fainted, or if he faked that, but the Police restrained him. My daughter and I were watching everything from the living room window, but as soon as she saw him hit the ground she ran outside. She was crying. I was crying. He was crying, handcuffed on the ground saying "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm not a bad person. It just takes over". To this, one of Police officers asked him if he wanted my daughter to sit with him. When Jed said "Yes" the officer placed his hand on my daughter's shoulder and said "You're such a good person, standing by him. You really are. You need to keep doing that! You can sit with him now, he needs you. Then we will take him to the hospital, but you're okay to come down to visit him".

I had cuts all over me from taking the knife, hammer and screwdriver. My property was damaged from him kicking in the screen door. My daughter and I were very distressed. In all this the Police just looked at us blankly. It was as if they saw nothing but a sick man needing

their help. We recognised these Police officers, they knew us by name as this happened so frequently. In an 18-month period I made 37 calls for help to the Police. My children made calls too so altogether there were about 50 calls to my house. Every time the Police would arrive having decided and tell us "It's his 'mental health again'", "Poor guy, he's got a mental health illness. We will take him back to hospital and you should come down and be there for him". They could never see the kicked in doors, the blood dripping on my arms, my broken tooth. That was how it was every time. The Police would put him in cuffs for Jed's safety and then take him to the hospital, where they would sedate him and

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then discharge him within 12 hours. Only for Jed to come back to my home as soon as he could. Despite my begging, the hospital never admitted Jed for a long-term hospital stay, and they did not provide any ongoing therapies or supports. The doctors never saw the injuries I had, or acknowledged the fear I felt. I was told repeatedly by doctors, “Well, you need to understand his triggers to stop upsetting him”. The Psychiatrists, doctors and mental health team did not even listen to Jed, because if they were truly listening, they would have realised he wasn’t having “PTSD episodes”, but he was a sick, unhealthy, alcoholic who actually needed some supports around him to learn how to be a contributing member of society, instead of the doctors just prescribed stronger PTSD drugs that clearly were not working. The hospital staff made it clear that his mental health was my job, my responsibility, my burden. I paid for him to see several different therapists, but I could not maintain the cost while also paying for everything else.

At one point he decided he wanted a new car. He said initially that he would get his car loan in his name. Together we went to the car yard. I chose a car for myself and Jed chose the car he wanted. When the salesperson asked how we were financing this he declared it would be joint names. I could always sense his emotional state from his body language. When we walked into the office he puffed up his chest and then hunched his shoulders, which always meant that he was going into a deep PTSD depressive state. He then stood up and declared “I’ve got a bad credit rating, I won’t get a loan” he indicated to me and said “you will need to” and then he said, “I need to have a smoke”. He simply walked outside. I knew that gesture meant “I’m in that suicidal, aggressive place”. My instinct was, I can’t let him get to that state in this environment. Whenever he did it lose it, he had no shame in screaming. I knew he would scream at me. There would be lots of profanities. I would be humiliated. Other people may interject and be in danger of his temper. I thought “Oh my god, I’m just going to have to go through with signing this loan form now and pull out in cooling off.” My only thinking that I had to avoid a scene there. During the 48-hour cooling off period, I was too scared to tell him in person that I wouldn’t go through with the car loan, so I waited until he was out and called him on the phone and I said, “Look, I’ve decided I can’t go through with the loan”. His reply was to say “Oh, that is cruel of you to do that to me. I have missed this opportunity because of you”.

“Oh well, do what you need to do. But I’m telling you that this will be the difference that stops me wanting to commit suicide. If you don’t do it the way I want, then you don’t love me. If you don’t love me, then I don’t want to live.”

As I had a career and good income, he was unemployed and never attempted to find work, he always say it was “Selfish” of me to say “No” to him. I always tried to explain, I would show him the budget explaining that “I have a good income but we were a family of six. You are not paying for either yourself or your child. I am managing two properties, paying all expenses and saving to build a house - the budget only goes so far”.

Jed would always say, “That makes no logical sense. You are obviously spending money and hiding that from me”. Whenever I pushed back, he just switched to “Oh well, do what you need to do. But I’m telling you that this will be the difference that stops me wanting to commit suicide. If you don’t do it the way I want, then you don’t love me. If you don’t love me, then I don’t want to live” and then would threaten or attempt suicide. I didn’t want to be responsible for him ending his life. So I always gave in, sacrificed something for myself, and took another loan.

Twice, I went to the Police station and said, “I want someone to document down the full facts”. I told them about the way Jed was pressuring me to take out loans, the threats, the aggression, the holes

he punched in the walls. The Police took notes and said, "Okay, I have a record here".

I actually said, "I don't think this is okay". To this, the Police officer gave me a card about domestic and family violence and said, "Here's a little information sheet. You should probably look through this and then contact the numbers". At that point I wasn't sure if this applied to me because he had a "mental health issue". I could see Jed's behaviours were certainly in line with the checklist on the DV card, but I wasn't sure if that was his intent. So, I asked the Police officer what he thought, and he said, "Well, I don't know. But maybe you need to ring them and find out if it applies to you because he does have a 'mental health issue'".

Again, I heard another Police officer dismiss and excuse everything because he has a "mental health issue". So I just let it go and I didn't do anything. I believed the role of the Police is to keep people safe, so I did expect they would tell me if this was domestic violence. As his actions were always excused, and I was always told to keep supporting him, I started thinking "I am a bad person. I was doing something wrong. I needed to be more supportive of him. The problem was me".

As his mental health got worse, and episodes were more frequent, I wouldn't let Jed move back into my home. It wasn't safe for the children. I was maintaining a relationship with him because I was still caring for and providing a home for his kid, Stevie. My care and my love was all about protecting Stevie's wellbeing while trying to keep my kids safe. So, I insisted that he lived at his brother's house. I did allow him to visit, and stay over at times, but I wouldn't let him move back in until he was in treatment and mentally well.

Jed always tried to take ownership of that land I bought and constantly referred to the property as "ours". But there was no housing on the land, there were just a few sheds, but no power or running water. Jed decided he wanted to live in the shed, on my property, rather than live with his brother. I wouldn't let him, as I had spoken with a lawyer once I recognised that this relationship probably wasn't going to last. The lawyer explained that if I exceed the two-year window of living together, we would be classed as living in a de facto relationship. So, I insisted we weren't going to get to that point. I wouldn't let him move home or to stay on my property and risk him taking more of what I had worked my life to create, my children's home and future. I was always smart about thinking about what I can navigate and mitigate to protect my future. Jed kept pushing to live on the land and I kept saying "No, it is my property, and we are not in de facto relationship". I did say to him "If you want to share ownership and your name on the mortgage, then you can invest, but unless you're actually contributing financially, I'm not giving you any ownership". This refusal had gone on for days. In the end, he rocked up at my house and said, "I'm in a really bad state. Take me to the hospital". So, I did. I drove him to the hospital. He said to me, "I'm going to drink this beer on the way because it will keep me calm". When we arrived at the hospital, he had a beer bottle in his hand, walked to the entrance and the security guard came forward and spoke to him about holding the beer, he smashed the bottle and slit his wrists. This time he actually sliced through his veins and seriously injured himself and he was admitted to hospital to recover from the surgeries.

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I also kept saying, “where’s your duty or care to me?” Then she would speak over me.

While I was at work I received a call from the hospital psychologist. Jed was in the same room, and I could hear him saying “I want to go live up on the land. She won’t let me”. During this conversation the psychologist kept pressuring me, asking “Do you not care about him? He says this is the place he’s going to be healthy and well in”. I had to explain that it’s not a safe environment; “He has wounds on his wrists, 15 staples, and he is on a drip. There’s no power on the land. There’s no water. There’s no bed. It’s just a shed. It is not medically safe and it is miles away from anywhere, with no phone service. It’s not a mentally or physically safe environment for him to be in”. She ignored all of this and again explained he wanted to live there. So, I also asked her “Can I speak to you without him around?” She said, “No, he is my patient. I just need an answer from you. Are you going to let him stay up there?” I said several times, “It’s not safe for him.” I also once asked, “Where’s your duty of care to me? As I was present when he did this and your accusation now is upsetting me” but she just spoke over me. I heard Jed whispering in the background, “See, I told you she won’t let me. See, I told you she’s trying to control me”. The psychologist then said to me; “What we need from you is just a yes or no. Do you love him and will you let him stay there?” Actually, they are two separate questions. Do I love him? At the time I thought I did. But I was not going to allow him to stay in an unsafe place. But the psych just kept repeating, “It’s a yes or no”. So, I said, “If you are not going to listen, then it’s a no”. I overheard her saying to Jed, “You’re right and we do need to talk about getting you out of this relationship and somewhere else”. Then she disconnected the call and I was banned from the hospital.

It was some months later, there had been several more incidents where he was drunk, aggressive, had “PTSD episodes”. He hurt me and damaged my property. He was not living with me, and on every occasion the Police would remove him from my house and take him to his brother’s house where he was living. The last time I saw him, the children and I were in a serious car accident. I was not at fault. I was hit by another driver. The car got written off, the children had whiplash and I had fractures all over my body. I called Jed to the accident as Stevie was injured, and I also called my ex-husband to support my other children. Jed took us to the hospital and played the role of the caring partner that night. I was not released from the hospital until the following morning. Jed stayed and helped the next day genuinely seeming to care until my parents dropped in and mentioned that we had seen them the day before we had been celebrating my father’s birthday. The moment he realised we hadn’t invited him his demeanour changed instantly. One of my daughters asked if there was any more cake left over and made a comment that her brother must have eaten the rest of it while we were all in the hospital. Jed didn’t say anything at the time but we knew he was angry. The kids and I tried to act like everything was okay and try to keep him calm. I was in agony. Absolute agony. My chest was fractured. I had to take some painkillers and went to lay down. I hadn’t slept a wink following the accident and the hospital stay. So, I go to bed, it was about 7pm. The codeine I took made it almost impossible for me to stay awake. I didn’t know it would do that to me, I never needed codeine before the accident.

I found out later that Jed went to my son’s bedroom to have a go at him yelling, “Did you eat the birthday cake”? My son replied, “I didn’t”. Jed stormed away from my son, and he came into my room screaming at me, but I couldn’t remain awake. I would open my eyes and think, “Oh, he’s yelling at me. What’s he saying?” Then I would fall straight back to sleep. Because I wasn’t reacting the way Jed wanted, nor was I able to say, “Take your diazepam and walk outside”. He drank an entire bottle of whiskey, he became irate, and he jumped on top of me pushing into my shoulders to pull my fractured chest further apart. I was screaming. He tore the nerves in my neck and ripped my rotator cuff in my shoulder. Stevie ran into the room. I have no idea how Stevie did it, but Stevie managed to pull him off me. That was the first time he was actually able to seriously hurt me as it was the only time I couldn’t defend myself.

My oldest daughter came running into the room. He turned on her screaming and waving his fists, in response she was forced to cower and make herself small in the corner. By that point, I managed to get myself up off the bed. The pain I was in was overwhelming. Stevie's started pushing and shoving him out to try to get him out of the house. I was trying to get my daughter to the other end of the house where she could be safe.

I dragged myself over to the kittens and I laid my body over them to protect them. Stevie kept pushing her dad outside and he had him almost to the front door when he turned around and ran back into the kitchen grabbed a kitchen knife.

We had three kittens that were only a few weeks old. Jed picked up the kittens and tried to choke and kill them. I wrestled the kittens from him and once the kittens were freed from his grip, he picked me up and threw me across the room. I hit a wall and collapsed on the floor. I was unable to stand so I dragged myself over to the kittens and laid my body over them to protect them. Stevie kept pushing Jed trying to move him outside. He was almost to the front door when he turned around, pushed Stevie back and ran into the kitchen grabbing a knife. Waving the knife he was yelling to the kids, "I'm going to kill your mother. You're going to find her in pieces". He went to my son's room, to my daughters room, so that they could hear clearly, "I'm going to kill your mum".

My daughters were hiding under the bed while they called the Police begging them to hurry before he killed me.

I finally managed to get up from the floor. He still had the knife, but all I was thinking was "I have to help Stevie get him outside". I knew I wouldn't be able to fight him for the knife. So, we just pushed and pushed and pushed, physically, until we got him out and we locked the door. Jed took the knife over to the corner shops where he demanded cigarettes and handed over my phone saying "Jules will come and pay for it later". After he had smoked a few cigarettes, he walked back to the house and by that time the Police had arrived and were inside with me.

Jed knocked on the front door with the knife in his hand. A female Police officer answered the door and he said to her, "Here you go. I have put the knife on the floor. You can take me to the hospital now". I recall the Police officer looked at me, looked at him, stepped outside and said, "You're not going to the hospital" and arrested him. The difference this time was that I had a female Police officer. Before then we almost always had the same male Police officers. I can only ever recall two or three other female officers but on those occasions, they were observing in the background. That night the female Police officer took our statement and said to me "This is domestic violence". I cried. It was such a relief. My first thought was "Thank goodness. I'm not crazy". I had been questioning this for so long. I felt grateful she saw his abuse for what it is, not just excusing his behaviours. It was the first time I didn't hear "Oh but he has a 'mental health condition'".

That night the female Police officer took our statement and she just said to me then, that night, "this is domestic violence".

From previous incidents I had met with the executive staff in Child Protection who asked me "What are the steps you're taking to manage Jed's mental health and protect Stevie?" Never did they ask

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burden was mine. I got to the point that whenever a person told me I was “resilient” I would just cry, “I don’t want to be ‘resilient’ because that means no one is actually helping me”.

Since the last incident, I have been really terrified that he was going to turn up at my home. I thought about moving but I have the dilemma of Stevie. I was worried what would happen if I moved and Stevie wanted to keep in touch with Jed? Why move if he’s going to know where his child is? I needed to find what the options there would be Stevie if I was forced to do take this step. So, I contacted Stevie’s Social Worker who had been working with Stevie for years. The Social Worker was very informed about Jed’s behaviours and the dangers facing Stevie. She used to tell me all the time, “I’m so glad Stevie lives here with you. You are looking out for Stevie which is great”. After the assault I rang the Social Worker and said, “Look, you don’t know everything. Let me take you through the recent events”. I shared the assault and that Stevie had been living with me and Child Protection had been involved. I explained “I now need to explore the options because Stevie’s wants contact with Jed, and this is causing me a lot of fear and stress. I’m not asking you to go find Stevie foster care. I’m asking you what are the options if at some point in the future Stevie and I have a conversation and we recognise that the best pathway is for Stevie to go elsewhere, what are Stevie’s options?” To that Social Worker replied, “I don’t care about your kids. Stevie is my client”. I wrote a letter of complaint about the Social Worker, but I didn’t hear back from the organisation. They just acted like nothing happened. No apology. No contact. Nothing. Just ignored it.

Meanwhile, Jed tracked my employer down on social media and started messaging her, saying things like, “Your employee deliberately tried to kill somebody with a disability through emotional manipulation”. My employer received multiple texts and she sent all the messages to me. Jed also posted online comments about me “Deliberately trying to kill people with disabilities”. I had to contact several search engines to have this removed – it took about a week and a half to get it down.

So, then I went to the Police station to report this. While I was at the Police station, giving a statement, Jed started ringing me over and over, and over again. This was in front of the Police, I took the call from him and said, “You are not allowed to ring me. There is a restraining order in place”. I hung up. Again, that was right in front of a Police officer. But the Police were more interested in the fact that Police station was about to close at nine o’clock. The Police asked me, “To come back tomorrow and finalise it?” When I came back the next day, there was a really long wait and after 25 minutes, I had a panic attack and left in tears, without finalising the statement. So, there was no formally recorded breach of the restraining order that time.

About two weeks after that, Jed accessed my property, and he stole jet ski, I had a loan for. I reported these to the Police right away. There was a 50m property boundary within restraining order. I also

about my children, and their expectation was that I needed to do something to fix this. I would tell them “I am paying for therapy. I am in a support group. Stevie has counselling and supports for education and schooling”. The Child Protection staff reassured me that what I was doing was reasonable and fair. But after the assault, I contacted the Child Protection staff for support they asked, “Is Jed returning back home?” So I said, “No, he won’t. He will never come back. There is an Apprehended Violence Order in place. Stevie is wanted here, we love Stevie”. They asked Stevie what their preference was, and Stevie said it was to live with me and my family, so, the Child Protection staff closed the matter. I never received any support. Once again, the responsibility and

reported the abusive text messages too. The Police officer I spoke with said “Oh, we’ll do something about it. We’re going to arrest him for breaches of the restraining order. But we have to wait for the officer that’s on your case”. He was on long service leave when he came to my property and stole the car. This was the car he had forced me to take a loan out on.

Jed was sending me abusive texts for an average of 8 hours per day, every day for months. That, with his comments and social media posts, meant it got to the point where I had to tell the board and executives where I work. My employer had to lock down the lifts so no one could get up to my office. My colleagues escorted me to and from my car because I was terrified that he would be waiting for me out the front.

Eventually the Police officer returned from leave and rang me on the phone and said, “Oh, I hear you’ve had some trouble”. That’s how he described I, as “Some trouble”? I was terrified at this point. The officer explained “I’m going to ring him and ask him to come down to the Police station”. I couldn’t believe it, they were not going to arrest him but let him know I reported him and hope he would voluntarily go to the Police station. I thought, “Jed’s going to know what I have done and come here and hurt us”. I was terrified. I wouldn’t leave the house. I wouldn’t let my kids leave the house that weekend. The Police did nothing until Monday. The Police rang me and said “Oh, he came in today and we told him you reported him, so he was charged and released on bail”. The Police officer said, “He’s got a mental health condition, so we didn’t detain him”. So, within an hour, they have told Jed that I reported him and released him. I said, “Are you serious? I’ve got PTSD because of his abuse. Is that now an excuse for me to break the law?”

Later I found the Police were bundling all of the offenses into one charge, but were not doing anything about the car or the jet ski because “There was no proof”. Jed admitted to the Police that he took both the car and jet ski, but the Police said they couldn’t use his testimony against him. I argued that it was theft because I was the owner of these things. But the Police just said it is “A property settlement issue”. I had the cop on loudspeaker and I said to him, “For god’s sake. There’s a 50-meter boundary restraining order in place and he’s by his own words taken two vehicles 20-meters from my property. How are you not acting on that? Is it 50 meters or is it not?” His exact words were, I’ll never forget it were, “Well, 50m, is really a guide. It’s about making sure that he doesn’t harass you

“Don’t get mad at me. Look, you need to be grateful because at least you’re not getting beat up all the time”.

and it was three o’clock in the morning when he took the car. You should have been asleep”. I lost it and said, “Are you fucking kidding me? Am I only safe between the hours of 6 AM and 10 PM?” Then the Police officer said, “Don’t get mad at me, you need to be grateful, at least you’re not getting beat up all the time”. I just said, “Oh my god, I don’t actually ever want to speak to you again. You’ve done nothing but let me down. You’re not listening. I don’t want to ever hear from you again”. I hung up on the Police officer.

After that, I wrote to the Police executive staff asking to discuss limitations in the Police department and how they need to better educate Police so that they recognise the intersection between mental health and domestic violence. They need to better educate Police, so they don’t keep continually

“He’s going to realise I’ve done something, and he will come down here and hurt us. That’s why I was terrified. I wouldn’t leave the house. I wouldn’t let my kids leave the house that weekend”.

saying things that are insensitive and make things worse for the victims, especially children. The stuff the Police said to my kids really made them feel like they were bad people when they didn't want to go see him at hospital or wanted to stay away from him for their safety. Police should listen to children. They need to start asking children "How are you feeling?" and acknowledging they have a right to feel

"Right so, because he said we were in a de facto relationship, and even though he's a known criminal with a history of violence, you believed him without asking me? Or even looking at your own records".

however they feel. The Police need to start asking "How can I help you? Do you have questions for me you'd like to ask?" I have met with a senior Police executive and shared examples that related to my situation. A senior responder contacted me telling me they had actually read every single Police callout to my place. The person I spoke with said, "Look, there's an absolute pattern. There are a number of things and a number of prior times that what you went through was domestic violence and you can press charges". So, they said, "I'd like you to think about doing that". Honestly, I am not sure that I want to keep reliving it, but I felt like I was finally empowered to do something. The responder also spoke to that Police officer that had been connected to our case. He then contacted me and said, "I had a meeting with the Police executive staff, and I understand you don't feel like I've handled your case well". I was honest and said, "No, I think you've done an appalling job". He seemed open to listening to me, I said, "Primarily, it's about the jet ski and the car. They are stolen property. I don't understand why you're not pressing charges for the breach of restraining order. I actually feel like you should be seizing them back

and charging Jed for theft". The officer said, "We can't do that because it's a de facto relationship". I said, "No, it's not". Then the Policer seemed surprised and he said, "What?" I replied, "We weren't in a de facto relationship. The Family Law Act says you have to live together for two years, have a child together or declare the relationship de facto. If you'd done your job properly, you've realised that we weren't de facto...Jed never formally declared us as a de facto relationship. There was a period of about four months where we lived together. From your own Police records, you will find that every time you came to my residential address, you detained him and transported him back to his brother's address where he was living. So, if you had done your job, and researched the information you had available, you would have realised that we had only lived together for a few months and were not in a legal de facto relationship. The loans are all in my name. The assets are in my name. I'm the sole owner. We're not de facto so there is no property settlement! I can't even go to court for a property settlement because we don't actually have a de facto relationship".

The Police officer finally said, "I'm so sorry I never listened. Jed told me it was de facto so I accepted that". I said, "Right so, because he said we were in a de facto relationship, and even though he's a known criminal with a history of violence, you believed him despite me continually telling you the opposite? You didn't even look at your own records". In the end, this Police officer was great. He was able to get proof that Jed has my property and the Police Officer has escalated this to his legal department to find out if they can seize the assets back and charge Jed with theft. I'm waiting on a response from that.

There is one person who's been an absolute saviour throughout this. One woman has kept me sane - she's from the Women's Centre. I wouldn't have got through without her assurance and support. I really feel she cares. She is honestly the only good experience from any of the services I had. Her job was basically to keep track of everything and support me to connect with services I needed. She would ring me and talk to me about which program he was in, what was happening and my safety planning.

“He is telling the Psych, a court-appointed Psych, that he wants to get revenge on you. The way he’s behaving is so bad that the Psych’s don’t want to hear it anymore, she said, you have to take it as a legitimate threat. You need to be prepared”.

She rang me one day and said “Jed’s had five sessions of court mandatory therapy and I am sorry to tell you that the Psychologist has decided to remove him from therapy, because after five sessions, Jed showed no change or improvement. He keeps fixating on things that you’ve done wrong”. The psychologist said “He is not taking any responsibility. He wants to get revenge and so there’s no progress. So, they have removed him from the program”. I said, “Well, what does that mean? Are they putting him into some other therapy? What are they doing to keep an eye on him, to make sure the kids and I are safe?” She had to tell me that there were no more eyes watching over him. She said “I think you and your kids needed to be prepared to go to a shelter. He is telling the court-appointed Psych, that he wants to get revenge on you. The way he is behaving is so bad that the Psych’s don’t want to hear it anymore”, she said, “you have to take it as a serious threat. You need to be prepared”.

So, this woman helped me work out what I need to do. The kids and I had bags packed so if he turned up, we could immediately go into a shelter. I bought spare mobile phones and sim cards, clothing and essential all packed in our emergency bags. We are ready if we have to drop and go. I had to sit down and explain this to my children. That we needed to be prepared, all the while thinking, “This is not okay? Why can’t they just put him in a long-stay mental health facility? Why can’t they move him out of society because he’s the danger”. Instead, their plan was to isolate, hide and punish me and my children.

I grew up believing and having faith in a system which let us down. I ended up feeling more at risk than before I went to the Police. The last time I spoke to the Police officer I said “I will never call you if he rocks up here. I’m physically fit and capable of fighting back, I’m not calling you. I’m just going to keep my kids safe”. I’ve brought him to his knees with my martial arts training in the past and I will do the same again. I would choose fighting back and keep myself safe, rather than wasting my time calling the Police anymore”. Sadly, I’m in the minority, I don’t think that many women have my martial arts training so they do need to rely on the Police that just don’t care. It’s been difficult for me to navigate over the last six months. It’s still constantly painful. It’s my first and my last thought in every quiet moment. I’m this capable and am struggling so how many other people, are let down by the services and systems. I only just found out this week that Jed has had long a pattern of perpetrating violence. I wasn’t the first woman he has assaulted either. That just leaves me gobsmacked. How did the system, and the Police who see these records and know he has hurt other women, disregard this and go, “Oh, well, it’s only a ‘mental health’ issue?”

I had faith in a system and then the system let us down and I ended up feeling more at risk than before.

All they needed to do was listen, just listen to me. I don’t want people to necessarily tell me what to do because I am resourceful. Just listen to me. If the Police had listened, then he would have found that we weren’t in a de facto relationship. If the doctors had listened they would have known it wasn’t PTSD causing this. If the DV services had listened, they would have realised that I was wanting to protect all my kids and Stevie too.

There have been some nice moments. This week my two eldest kids were chatting about their exams, school, friends and everything that matters to teenagers. I looked at them and I thought "I've actually done a good job". I've got four kids who have every reason to just go, "Boohoo Life sucks", including Stevie. Instead the children have improved their grades, built closer connections and got stronger friendships than they've ever before. Here the kids were, all prepared and ready to go off to an exam. I realised we're doing okay. I have taught my children so many valuable things from this. Everything happens for a reason, that's my view in life. So, my reason is about being part of the change, bringing awareness, helping others. That's what I'd like it to be. That's going to be my story.

"I don't want people to necessarily tell me what to do because I am resourceful. Just listen to me".

Acknowledgement and thanks

Insight Exchange would like to thank the person with lived experience of domestic and family violence who has generously shared their insights for the benefit of others.

We acknowledge that despite our best efforts to assemble with a person a more accurate representation of some of their experiences of violence, we can never fully understand all that their experiences mean to them now or through their life. We understand that no one's life experience can ever be fully represented in language or any other form.

Handle with dignity

You have been reading a carefully assembled excerpts of peoples lived experience of domestic and family violence. These are not simply another 'story', 'sample' or 'case study'.

Whilst consent has been obtained to share these accounts, we ask that as the custodian of these copies that you uphold the dignity of the people who shared them as you distribute and store them. Tips for handling with dignity:

- Keep the copies in an envelope distinct from paperwork and reports
 - Explain the importance and value of these accounts before distributing them
 - Collect any copies left behind by delegates/participants after workshops
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Further resources and support

My Safety Kit is an Insight Exchange resource for any person who at some point may be reflecting on their own relationships and experiences of domestic and family violence. The resource may also have benefits for people who are:

- Supporting friends and family who are (or might be) experiencing domestic and family violence
- Working as a service responder to people experiencing domestic and family violence

[My Safety Kit](#) includes contact details for services across Australian states and territories that may be able to support a person in their next steps. It is available online at www.insightexchange.net.

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Disclaimer: This Voices of Insight is a carefully assembled excerpt of a person's lived experience of domestic and family violence. Details of this person's identity have been altered to protect their safety. Whilst great care has been taken to do no harm and to contribute to improved understanding of and responses to domestic and family violence, Insight Exchange assumes no responsibility for how the resource is used by other parties.
