

* 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.

Casey

We all have a choice. People always try to take the easy road, and there's no easy way to get to somewhere in life. It's always hard work. If you can change the narrative of people's thoughts, of what they see and what they do, I think that we can stop domestic violence. I've done it. I chose to take a different path to the men in my life that used violence, as did my siblings. We have a choice in life to refuse to be violent. As a proud Wiradjuri man, I make this choice every day. Each morning I honour and pay respects to Grandfather Sun, Grandmother Moon and Mother Earth.

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My mum, who is Irish, was born into a massive family. My mum was the most beautiful lady you ever met. My father is Wiradjuri, but I don't know anything about his history. I do know that my father comes from a mission near there. But I didn't really know him as a child, I only got to meet my father when I was 51 and he was very sick in hospital. When mum and dad were really young, just teenagers, they moved to Coonabarabran. They lived in tents and in a large public park for six months until they got a four-bedroom housing commission place.

My mum said that her father, my grandad, used to rape my nan all the time. That's why my nan was always pregnant. Because my mum was the eldest girl, she was also a mum to all her younger siblings. Just recently, mum has started to get dementia. Apparently, for some people, when you get dementia, you start telling things about your childhood. Just a few weeks ago, mum told me that her dad used to make nan send the girls into the bedroom to him - their own daughters. Mum said that nan sent her into his room twice. The second time he assaulted her, mum just laid there, and in response he just kicked her out like a dog and yelled "get somebody else in here". Mum's just been downtrodden her whole life.

I was born in that house in Coonabarabran too and so were my siblings - there were four of us. One time, we lived in nan's house. There were four different families, that's twenty-four people living in her place. Mum's brothers and sisters had their kids in there too, so you can only imagine what it was like. My older sister was raped by one of mum's brothers. Mum's brother used to say to my mum, about my sister, "if you don't get rid of that effing C, we're going to kill her. She's ugly and she doesn't shut up. Get rid of her". That's why we never got her back. She went to live with a family friend. I don't know a lot about my dad, but I do know that he raped my mum's sister, who was 13 at the time and apparently, back in the day, this was just accepted. Mum let him back into her life, and he played up with one of mum's other sisters. So then, she told him to leave. He left. After that, mum had to go away to work, she was picking fruit. Temporarily, we all got disbanded out into different homes. Me and my brother were with our Aunties. Some went to friends' places and one of

my sisters never got to come back home. Then mum met “stepfather”. He was very abusive, and he was a drunk. He was the nastiest man I’ve ever met, and I’ve never called him “my dad” in my life. Mum realised this she said to me once, “I know it’s because of what you copped. I know that he was a nasty man to you. He was nasty to me too.”

My stepfather’s parents told him that he needed to leave home when he was 12 years old. So, he slept at the train station. The station master said to him “if you sweep up this platform every day, I’ll feed you, and you can sleep here”. He ended up getting a job on the rail. So, he had his back to the wall, as well, I guess. But hey, it’s not an excuse. You can always change, and that’s what I did. I’ve told mum, “You did the best with what you had”. She had to survive. She had a family that she had to keep housed, and she did it all on her own. Back in those days, when mum first got rid of my real father, she was frowned upon for being a single mum. Things were different then. It was like violence was accepted and that’s why people like my stepfather got away with it. He was one of the worst.

We ended up moving out of that house in Coonabarabran, and after that we kept moving around. I was in and out of about five different housing commission places in my life until adulthood. The house in Werris Creek was where I remember my stepfather abusing us the most. How do we say this? He was physically abusive. He was mentally abusive. We hated him. I still hate him to this day, to be honest. He’s dead now, and I don’t care. It might sound a bit harsh, but the way that he treated us was so bad. He favoured the two younger ones, so it was me that copped the most. He targeted me because I was mum’s favourite and she protected me the most. I was always the one that copped it. I remember one time when me and my brothers were all playing cricket in the front yard. We were only kids and we started arguing with each other. I went to get the cricket bat off my brother. But he lifted up the cricket bat and hit me over the head with it – just as he did that, my stepfather walked out the front. So, stepdad saw my brother hit me over the head, and for some reason stepfather turned on me and flogged me in response - he said it was my fault. Stepdad

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wouldn’t do any harm or wrong to the younger brother, because he was always the one that was right, and I was always the one who was in the wrong, always the one to get flogged. Another time, my older brother, came home drunk. My stepfather bashed him up in the toilet. I would have been 14 at the time and my other siblings were 10 and 6, we heard everything. Mum stood up for my brother and so stepdad turned around and bashed her up. She says she doesn’t remember any of this sort of stuff now.

One time, we were all coming home from a party, I’ll never forget it. He was absolutely paralytic drunk. Mum was saying “let me drive, let me drive”. He kept saying “No, no. I’ll drive, I’ll drive”. We get in the car there’s me and my brother and mum in the back seat of the old Ford and he was at the wheel. I looked at the clock, and he was going 130 miles an hour down a hill. Mum was screaming,

and he was clapping his hands and screaming, laughing like a madman. Then he suddenly stopped and said “oh, you’d better drive, because I might get booked”. One night he was that drunk, and he threw a knife at mum. The knife cut her leg open. It never ended. There was always something. You could never do anything right. One night at the dinner table, he was just chipping away at me,

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chipping away. Mum told him to “stop it”. He got up and shoved mum and said “Just stay the eff out of it. You eat this, and you eat that”. As he was yelling at her, I threw a chicken bone at him and hit him in the head, and my brother laughed. My brother was drinking a milkshake, and because he was laughing so much the milkshake went all over his face. So, we all started laughing. Stepdad ran over and hit my brother so hard across the head, just because he laughed at him.

In the area we lived, the white locals called it “vegemite village” – it was a racist slur. The white people hated “vegemite village” or “veggie”, they hated the Aboriginal people who lived there. It was literally one of the only suburbs on the other side of the trainline. There was always a lot of abuse in that area as well. All I ever wanted was to be accepted. I just wanted to hang out

with the cool kids. But no-one wanted to hang with the “housos”, and especially “housos” from “veggie”. I remember one time I tried to hangout with the cool kids. Some boys I knew from the other side of town were talking about getting in their dad’s boat and going fishing. They were planning to hangout for the whole day. I really wanted to do that, so I went over to their place, knocked on the door, and asked their mum “could I play with the boys?” The mum disappeared from the front door and when she came back she said, “oh, they’re not here. They’ve gone out”. I went around the corner, leaned up against the fence of the old drive-in theatre. I remember looking through their fence, and I could actually see the boys playing together in the backyard. So, they told their mum to “tell him I’m not here”. That’s how it was over there.

There was a lady who lived across the road from us. My old man would get drunk and sit outside our window on the veranda, and he’d just argue with this lady through the house. He’d do it for hours. There are times when stepdad had fallen asleep, and collapsed on the concrete, and then he would get up screaming. He made up stories saying that someone had run through the yard and hit him over the head with a stick to account for why he had fallen over. We also had people come in and fight stepdad on the front lawn, for whatever reason. When he would come home from work, we would hear his car coming down the street. The mood in the house would change, “what are we in for today?” We would have cards nights at that house, and we always hung with these four particular families every weekend. Sometimes we had barbecues together or the kids would be hanging out, just watching telly. One particular night, I still remember it quite vividly, the usual families had come around so there were about eight adults and probably fifteen kids. I was the eldest kid, about 16 years at the time. We were all in the lounge room, all hanging out. My sister, who was about 20 at the time, came home drunk from a work party. As soon as she walked inside, my stepfather said, “where have you been you effing trollop?” My sister told him to “get stuffed”. It all unfolded in front of all of us.

He stood up and backhanded her that hard that she went flying headfirst and as she fell against the wall, her head went right through the wall. After the big hit he went over to get her again. Everything just stopped. That’s when my mum went straight up to him, and she physically put her body in front of my sister to try to stop stepdad.

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But he didn't stop. He kept going at my mum and my sister. We were all very quiet, very scared. All the kids started crying. All the adults just sat there. None of the adults there, who were fathers and mothers, none of them said or did anything. It was like they all just accepted stepdad's violence, as though they didn't even care. One by one the adults all got up, picked up their kids, who were screaming and crying, and all they just went home. It was left up to us to defend ourselves, without saying it, the message was, "do your best".

I just remember saying how much I hated him, I was screaming and defending my sister. My thoughts were how much I hated him, and then how much I wanted to kill him. I remember saying to myself, "well, I'm not going to do that. I'm never going to use violence or hurt anyone. I'm not going to live like this, and I am not going to be like him". There was a lot of swearing, a lot of shouting. There were effing-bombs and C-bombs and then I heard mum yell out "she's gone". My sister had jumped out the window. She escaped the house and went into town to the phone box, and she had called my brother. About half-an-hour later, we hear a car coming down the road. It was my sister and my brother.

When my stepfather hit my sister that was the day I said "well, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to live like this and I am not going to be like him".

My brother was 25 at the time, and we'd all had enough of it. We were sick of what had been going on throughout our whole lives. My brother came home that night. I'll never forget it. He slammed the door open, and the door handle went right through the wall. So, all the stepfather was worried about was the hole in the wall. But he wasn't worried about the hole in the wall that he had just created by putting my sister's head through it. My brother was crying, but he was also smiling. He had a rock in his hand and said to stepdad "come outside here". My mother held stepdad back inside. I believe if he had killed my stepfather that day, I think my brother would have got away with it. I think he would have got off, because everyone knew what he did to us in that household. After that, stepdad was never physically violent towards my brother or sister again. The only person he kept physically assaulting was me. He continued to be emotionally abusive towards everyone.

My whole life was sport. I did that to get away from the abuse and it wasn't the fact that I loved every single sport I played. So that was a strategy for me. It was for me to get away from stepdad, and it didn't cost any money to play most of these sports. Except for the men's soccer, I played with a friend and his dad paid for me to play. These were the ways I could get away from my stepfathers' abuse. Like I said, I was the main target of his abuse, all the time. Up until the age of 18, I would play school sports on Saturdays. I would play hockey at eight o'clock, rugby league at twelve. Then, I would play men's first grade soccer at three o'clock. This kept me away from that house for another five hours. I used to go home on the Sunday. On a Tuesday night I would go to basketball. The gave me some reprieve from him and playing on Tuesday nights meant that I did not have to see him get drunk. But he would always say to me, "if you're not home at this time or you're not home that time, oh, you'll get a flog". But I would come home late, and he would always be passed

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out drunk or sleeping anyway. He would be totally gone, out like a light.

By the time I was 14 years I was playing in men's first grade. In the summertime also played water polo – I had to get up at four in the morning, and ride 5 kilometres to the pool so I could play by eight o'clock in the morning. Cricket used to start at twelve and that went for five hours. So, I would get a lift out of there, and a lift to get home. The mornings were really tough with this schedule, my siblings and I would have our breakfast. I would have to make all our beds too. My two siblings would have to wash up. But at least by this time of the day stepdad was already gone. This gave me some time where it was just us, my siblings and my mum.

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Of course, all the people who lived in our street knew about the abuse. None of my friends ever came to stay at my house, ever. Even in my teenage years, I never ever invited anyone stay, because it was embarrassing. I don't even know whether my brothers and sister told anybody else, to be honest. When we were younger, I did my best to never be there. My brother, he was always away with his mates, doing stuff too. It was survival. Mum always worked two jobs. Mum worked in the hospital linen service, but she also worked at the pub as a barmaid. Stepdad would come in and sit at the bar and if she spoke to anyone, then he'd bash her up when they got home. Every Saturday was her house cleaning

day, and Sunday was a rest day. She'd do it all over again. She would make breakfast for us every single morning, and our lunches. Every single morning - whether it was savoury mince and some eggs in the oven, or whatever. Sometimes, he would bring home Chinese food and long soup. Mum would go to give us kids a bit out of her plate. I remember one night, he just whacked the plate, and the plate went flying over her “You're not getting any of this effing food”. It was horrendous. It was relentless. There were days where I'd get on a bike and just ride up the end of the street and sit there for hours thinking “I just, I don't want to go home”.

I made the State running team and had to compete at a running race in Sydney. The track was brand new at the time. So, mum bought me some spikes, and then of course stepdad found out that I got spikes, and he made her take them back to the shop. So, I had no spikes to go to the State finals. I was the only kid there with no spikes. The coaches all said to me “well, you can't run”. I started crying. The curator came up to me and said “come with me. I've got some spikes.” The spikes he gave me were so old. There was another kid there saying to me “what are you whinging for, you suck? Where are your shoes? You shouldn't be here anyway”. I didn't win the race. He didn't win the race either, but at least I beat him.

I wanted to be somebody. I started wagging school every Friday for three years. I could forge mum's signature, I used to write a note once a month and give it to my high school teacher. It said that I had to go to hospital every week on a Friday. This got me out of school, so I used to go work a bread run. I was also doing a milk run in the night-time. I wanted to save up and make sure that I had a good start in life. This is at 14, not 24 or 25. This is at 14. You grow up pretty quick in that kind of environment. You have to grow up

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quick, because otherwise you get left behind. We moved back to Coonabarabran, and I kept working on the milk run and the bread run during the week, and played sport, again and again, just to stay away. My folks never, ever supported me.

Stepdad never allowed my mum to watch me play, ever, even when my footy games were aired on the TV. I played in matches on TV maybe twenty times in my career. There was only one game that mum watched, and that was a game that we won a grand final. At the end of that game, the first-grade coach came up to me said to “if you stay fit, healthy and strong, I’ll guarantee you a spot in first grade”. When I came home from that game, stepdad’s words to me were, “oh, they’re a piss weak team, anyone could have beat them”. His abuse just kept going on like this for years. But I kept training. I trained and trained and trained again. I left school when I was about to turn 17. I also decided to move out and rent my own place. I had to get a job and fend for myself. So, I got a job as a labourer. The boss gave me a bed because I didn’t have a bed. I had to hire a TV and a fridge and a washing machine. It was pretty tough. But I think that probably set me up for the rest of my life, really, because I really learnt how to save.

The old man came home, called me a “lazy son. Get off your arse and get back to work”. I was lying there - I nearly lost an eye!

Around that time, I went out to a nightclub with my girlfriend at the time and some friends. I wasn’t drinking because I was training. Everyone else was drinking. I paid for everybody to get into the club, and I just had a soft drink. As I walked into the bar, I saw my girlfriend standing there covered in a pint of Guinness. She said she had an argument with these four big guys and one of them tipped his beer over her head. I put my arm around her shoulder and as we were about to walk away one of the men punched me in the back of the head. After the impact, I turned around to face him, and he had one of those big drinking steins, he raised it up and he smashed the stein into my face. I lost eyesight. I had to go to hospital for nine weeks. I was just lying on my back just trying to drain everything out the back of the eye. I was

there for so long I had bed sores. Then, the retina started coming off. I had six operations on that eye over the years.

When I came out of hospital after nine weeks I had to move back home because I couldn’t to afford to keep renting. I wasn’t working. The old man came home, and just spat at me “lazy son. Get off your arse and get back to work”. I was lying there - I had nearly lost an eye! I eventually got out of that house, and I made it with my sport. If you fast-forward a few years later, I went to visit mum. He was still alive and living with her. I walked into the living room, and I just stood there. He didn’t acknowledge me but he said loudly to the TV set, “what gives that effing Black (woman) the right to light that torch?” He was talking about Cathy Freeman carrying the torch for the Olympic Games. I am and I was so proud of her. He was just trying to get a bite out of me. My mum kept saying to me, “don’t do anything”. I was still big and still angry. I was a grown man in my 30s. It took a lot for me to not do anything to him for saying that. It wasn’t until I retired in recent times and some big-name players, said to me “why are you so aggressive, mate? You’re aggressive”. I’m the most placid bloke, so I understand now, that the anger was about me protecting myself.

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I have raised two sons, and I had a beautiful home for them to grow up in. But my ex-wife was really abusive to me. I had worked so hard, but I never got any accolades from my wife. I started to feel suicidal. I thought I had done everything the right way. I raised a good family. I worked hard my whole life. I played in the top-level sport for ten years, and we toured. I worked a full-time night shift in the mines. I thought all that all that hard work was for something. I was with my ex-wife for 24 years, so it wasn't five minutes. She got so controlling. I wasn't able to talk to anybody. She controlled the money. She controlled our lives. I wasn't allowed to have an identity or an opinion. I felt too scared to even talk to my brother, who was my best mate. She said to me, "don't you ever say anything to anyone". Eventually I just stopped talking. She complained about my silence, so she took us to marriage counselling. The marriage counsellor was the first person who told me my ex-wife emotionally abused me and that I had "emotional fear". I had never heard of that term before.

“You emotionally abused him for years. Is there any wonder he won't talk to you?”

The marriage counsellor also confronted my ex-wife and he said "you emotionally abused him for years. Is there any wonder he won't talk to you?". After that, she wouldn't allow me to talk in the counselling sessions. The counsellor saw that. Before I split up with my wife, I took my kids out to Werris Creek. I wanted to show them where I grew up. All the memories came flooding back. My eldest son, I don't know, he was probably 17, said to me, "you alright, Dad?" I went "oh, just a few emotions". It was sad to see the house, because the house was all boarded up.

The marriage split up. I was leaving the family home that we owned. We owned everything. I had totally blind sided my kids. When we told our kids we were separating. My son screamed – it took me back to my childhood, to be honest. But I'll never forget it. It sounded just like the way my sister screamed. So, I moved out and I had to live in my car for a bit. I ended up getting somewhere to live, but then my youngest son got sick. I blamed myself, because he got a disease that flared up not long after my ex-wife and I separated. My other son became unwell too. It all snowballed. I had two kids who were struggling with life, and I was struggling mentally.

I went to a psychiatrist, and he said, "so what's going on?" I told him everything. He said "well, what do you want me to do?" This was a bloke I was trying to get help from, and the only thing he could say was "what am I going to do?" I was about to walk out and I said to him, "mate, you're not even going to help me". The psychiatrist finally said "sit down. Look, off the record, You're in a really tough spot. But I don't know what to tell you to help you". He didn't ask any questions about the violence I had experienced as a kid or about the abuse from my ex-partner. But he said he wanted to put me on anti-psychotic meds. I don't like that stuff. I don't need that stuff. I've been on seven different antidepressant tablets, and one of them made me put on so much weight I went up to 107 kilos. I've never been over 100 kilos in my life. I was playing professional sports. I was at 98 kilos. The medication made me feel worse. The psychiatrist said to me "your façade, is your safety mechanism, and being a big guy. You've lost that, because you've put on weight. It will come back. Don't worry about that. You're still that same person". But what he said made me feel like I have failed.

I've joined a swimming club, which started in May last year, just a couple of the boys got together, down the beach, and started getting in the water. It's a group of men, we go down to the beach, we have a swim. It doesn't matter how good or how bad you are. There's always someone with you to have a chat and a coffee. Everyone gets out. It's like a shelter. Everyone can lean on each other.

There are no secrets. It's a core group, and I can lean on them more than others. I've told them my story. They've told me theirs and we are always there for each-other. A friend of mine passed away recently and I fell over. I was a mess. But I had boys from the swimming club coming down to the house and ringing me. I got a phone call from one of my mates, and I texted him back saying "I'm out" and he says, "where are you?" I told him the address of the cafe I was at and five minutes later, he walked into that cafe. He said, "I just want to give you a hug". That was huge for me.

He said, "I just want to give you a hug. That was huge for 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

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- Keep the copies in an envelope distinct from paperwork and reports
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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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