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It Stops Here: Safer Pathway

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Recently in the Blue Mountains I launched the domestic violence program *It Stops Here: Safer Pathway*. With more than 40 people in attendance, I was overwhelmed by the positive response from the local police, specialist domestic violence, health and community services.

The NSW Police Force is a critical agency in responses to domestic violence and often its members are the first on the scene. When I was a young child 30 years ago, the police would often turn up to my home and say, "Come on, let's head to the pub and have a drink until she calms down." Those sorts of responses have changed; there has been an important cultural shift.

When police attend a domestic violence incident they will now make an automatic referral to the local coordination point closest to where the victim lives. As the lead agency, it was wonderful to have such strong representation from the Blue Mountains Local Area Command and the Hawkesbury Local Area Command.

I acknowledge the presence and leadership that day of Detective Superintendent Darryl Jobson, the Blue Mountains Local Area Commander ; Detective Superintendent James Stewart, the Hawkesbury Local Area Commander ; North West Region Domestic Violence Sponsor, Detective Superintendent Gary Merryweather ; Detective Chief Inspector Almer ; and Domestic Violence Liaison Officer Senior Constable Lisa Murphy.

I make special mention of David McPherson, the Acting Region Domestic Violence Coordinator, whose knowledge, respect and commitment was of enormous assistance in the launch of this program.

Kay Hyman, the Chief Executive Officer, Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District, attended and spoke of the progress made since the introduction of the program in the Penrith area. She spoke of the importance of collaborative practice and a timely response.

A wide range of non-government organisations were represented including Blue Mountains Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program, Blue Mountains Women's Health and Resource Centre, West Connect Domestic Violence Services, Thrive Services, Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre, Wentworth Community Housing, Blue Mountains Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre, Family Referral Service, Nureen Women's Domestic Violence Support Service, Mountains Community Resource Network, Integrated Violence Prevention and Response Service, Glenbrook and Springwood preschools, and Blackheath and Winmalee neighbourhood centres.

That high level of collaboration and commitment is definitely a good news story. Domestic violence is responsible for approximately one to two deaths each week. A focus on women and children at high risk of injury or death is clearly needed to prevent victims from falling through the cracks. The *It Stops Here Safer Pathway* program will focus on high-risk victims and their children. Victims will be provided with coordinated support, reducing their need to retell their story and relive traumatic experiences.

To ensure that services have the capacity to respond in a timely manner and provide specific individual focus, it is essential that local services are appropriately funded to provide the necessary level of support. I am pleased that the Blue Mountains Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service [WDVCAS] has received funding to operate the local coordination point. With a strong track record of delivering services to women victims and their children, and effective working relationships with the police and other agencies, Blue Mountains WDVCAS is best placed to fulfill that role.

Blue Mountains WDVCAS will contact every victim and provide case coordination services, connecting the victim with local services. In other words, it will ensure that there are wraparound services that meet the needs of the victim and their children. Unfortunately, we have not seen the same level of commitment to women requiring specialist domestic violence refuge accommodation and case work support services.

Following the reform agenda ironically named *Going Home Staying Home* so many of our State's specialist domestic violence refuges were demolished, with only a few of our 81 refuges being dedicated specialist domestic violence women-only refuges. Even fewer are able to operate effective after-hours programs to ensure that women and children who are in a domestic violence crisis can access safe accommodation and appropriate referrals.

Recently I met with workers from my local women's refuge who explained the difficulties of providing an after-hours service. While the capacity to provide crisis services at a time of need is essential, much of the referrals and connecting of victims to services cannot happen after hours given that most agencies are closed at such times. A large amount of frustration was expressed, given it took nearly two years for the Department of Family and

Community Services to agree to the service allocating positions where needed and to allow its after-hours funding to be used for a daytime position. In this brave new world we have a Minister who does not support specialist domestic violence crisis refuges. Instead she supports the temporary accommodation model. Those in the field know that temporary accommodation cannot meet the needs of victims fleeing domestic violence.

How can women be kept safe when resources are clearly inadequate? I call on the Minister and the Government to put their money where their mouth is.