



# Trish Doyle MP

## Member for Blue Mountains



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### New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

#### Blue Mountains Women's Health and Resource Centre

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Tonight I acknowledge the work of the Blue Mountains Women's Health and Resource Centre in leading and coordinating innovative violence prevention programs for high school students in my electorate. Since 2001 this service has championed the delivery of domestic and sexual violence prevention programs in Blue Mountains high schools. Starting with PAIR—Preventing Abuse in Relationships—the service worked with our local women's refuge, local council and other community organisations to educate year 9 students about domestic violence and how to create healthy and safe relationships.

PAIR was embraced by Katoomba High School and ran for four years, educating around 700 young people during that time. In 2004, PAIR was transformed into Kinks and Bends, a program that was developed on the Central Coast and adapted to meet the needs of the Blue Mountains. This program had a much stronger focus on preventing sexual violence and abuse. It looked at issues such as healthy relationships, what abuse looks like, and the effects of drugs and alcohol in that scenario. The aim of this program was to educate young people who were just beginning to develop intimate relationships. For this reason the program targeted year 10 students.

In 2007 the Women's Health and Resource Centre, in partnership with the Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre, revamped the program and developed the Social and Safe program. I acknowledge the work of Lyn Pagan and Meredith Osborne in developing this program. Social and Safe uses a human rights framework and a strong gender analysis to work with young people about safe relationships. It explores issues like consent through the use of scenarios that encourages young people to talk about sexual ethics, sex role stereotypes and personal communication. It provides legal information about rights and responsibilities. It also promotes healthy, safe and respectful relationships. This program was well ahead of its time and explored cyber issues such as sexting, internet pornography and the implications for young people of social networking.

One of the strengths of the Blue Mountains Women's Health and Resource Centre is its capacity for innovation and collaboration. I pay tribute to Suzie Van Opdorp for building such an excellent service and team over many years. This is a strength of the community sector throughout my electorate—services enjoy collegial working relationships that promote wellbeing and build the resilience of the community. Through their efforts the Women's Health and Resource Centre has built a Social and Safe collaboration of around 20 local organisations including the Mountains Youth Services Team [MYST], the Mountains Outreach Community Service [MOCS], neighbourhood centres, the Legal Centre, Blue Mountains Council and Blue Mountains Family Support.

Using the Social and Safe program the Women's Health and Resource Centre has trained more than 40 facilitators in the Blue Mountains and Nepean areas, and it has been trialled in the Lithgow-Portland area. More than 2,000 young people have taken part. In 2010 the Women's Health and Resource Centre received a one-off Community Builders grant to review, revamp and consolidate the work of the Social and Safe program. This grant enabled the program to be rolled out at schools in Katoomba, Winmalee, Springwood and Blaxland, at the Lawson Youth College and at Korowal School. However, to ensure consistent education is made available to all students, ongoing funding is required.

One of strengths of the Social and Safe collaboration is the strong partnership between schools, and health and community organisations. Over the years teachers have come to value this partnership. A component of the program introduces young people to available resources and services in their local community. It creates a connection between students and local services, and provides a soft entry point. An example of this in action is the Women's Health and Resource Centre's free drop-in young women's health clinic. As a result of participation in the Social and Safe program, young women also typically access the health clinic's services. Here they can access sexual and reproductive health services, mental health assessments and counselling. Referrals can be made for sexual assault counselling and other specialist services.

I welcome the Government's announcement that anti-domestic violence lessons will be taught in schools, but we need more. We need the expertise of the services that are currently doing this work to be acknowledged and funded. We need Government to consult with the women's health and domestic violence services and build on what is working, rather than re-inventing the wheel. Government must consult with schools and communities to identify what is already being done, how they can do this better and then respond to the gaps. A long-term commitment is needed to address domestic and sexual violence if we are to have any impact, and it must be bipartisan.