

LAWWEEK
18-24 MAY 2020



W+K on COVID-19 and domestic violence

In acknowledgement of Law Week 2020, Wotton + Kearney is highlighting the important work that our pro bono and community partners are doing to support people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in some of our key areas of focus.

An increase in the rates of family and domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic has been reported in Australia and across the world with police and domestic violence services recording a surge in calls for help. For example, NSW Attorney General, Mark Speakman revealed last month that Google searches about domestic violence had increased by 75 per cent in NSW since the first recorded case of COVID-19 in NSW.

While online searches may have significantly increased, hotlines have seen a decrease in calls - suggesting that victims in self-isolation are unable to access those services safely. The various lockdowns which have been imposed to enforce the social distancing required to reduce the spread of the virus, have unfortunately also created the conditions which have been identified as increasing the risk of domestic violence.

DVConnect Chief Executive, Rebecca O'Connor, explains: "While isolation is not uncommon tactic of violence, whole communities in lockdown limiting access to workplaces, friends, extended family and community support, access to safe public places like schools and shopping centres – that disrupts a vital lifeline to those living with domestic abuse."

It is well documented that domestic violence surges during holiday and family gathering periods where there is more frequent and prolonged contact between family members. Organisations like the Domestic Violence Resource Centre of Victoria have also reported that rates of domestic violence also increase during periods of emergency. The nature of the COVID-19 lockdown creates more opportunities for abuse, as perpetrators of domestic violence can use the resulting environment to control their partner's movement, access to food, access to medical help and finances.

Job losses and the rising unemployment during the days of COVID-19 lockdown have also exacerbated the situation as financial stress has been found to have a direct correlation with rising domestic violence.

Assisting people escaping domestic violence, and the organisations which support them, is a key priority for Wotton + Kearney's Community Footprint program, with our team members volunteering their time in the community and providing pro bono legal help.

W+K has supported **Lou's Place** since the establishment of our Community Footprint program in 2012. Lou's Place is the only daytime refuge for women in Sydney, providing assistance and support for women in crisis who have often experienced complex trauma, domestic violence and homelessness.

In the face of the challenges COVID-19 presents for service delivery, Lou's Place is continuing to provide essential support to women who need access to a safe refuge. Facilities remain open for any immediate crisis and any new or existing case referrals are being made via telephone case management and support. Information is being provided to clients about COVID-19 and how to keep safe, along with packs of toiletries to help with hygiene. In collaboration with the social enterprise, Two Good Co, Lou's Place is also providing meals for the women they serve.

SUPPORT FROM W+K

Teams of W+K volunteers were previously cooking breakfast for Lou's Place clients once a month. While social distancing means breakfasts are currently on hold, some of our W+K female staff are volunteering by making 'kindness calls' providing social support by regularly checking in on vulnerable and isolated clients by phone.

W+K also supports 'Share The Dignity', a national charity which collects and distributes sanitary items to support women going without basic essentials.

Twice a year, Share the Dignity runs a 'Dignity Drive' where sanitary items are collected at over 1,900 collection points around Australia. Due to COVID-19, Share the Dignity sadly had to pack up all March collection boxes and hold off distributing those items to much needed charities. The good news is that Share the Dignity is currently working on an action plan. The August Dignity Drive is planned to go ahead with details to be released soon.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you are interested in making a difference to people escaping domestic violence, particularly at this time of acute need during the COVID-19 crisis, consider:

- **Donate** – Lou's Place at: <https://www.lousplace.com.au/donate>
- **Donate** – Share The Dignity at: <https://sharethedignity.com.au/donate-now/>
- **Make a purchase** – from Share The Dignity's partner Love Luna clothing store - an \$8 'period brief' purchase will go directly to a woman in need, and \$15 of every 'Share the Digni-Tee' purchase goes directly to Share the Dignity.
- **Buy** – Kate Christie's self-care book 'Me First', to fill your days of isolation whilst contributing to a donation of a pack of pads for every purchase: <https://events.humanitix.com/me-first-bookclub>

Contact us

For more information please contact us.



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