

## Media Release – For immediate release 16 September 2020

### Coronial inquest highlights police failings in responding to DV – an urgent inquiry into police response to DV is required

The coronial inquest into the deaths of Jack and Jennifer Edwards at the hands of their father has highlighted systemic failings on the part of police in responding to domestic violence in NSW.

The inquest has heard there were failings in how the domestic violence incidents preceding the children's homicides were responded to by police. This included:

- errors in recording of domestic violence incidents involving the children;
- police failing to speak with Jack and Jennifer in the investigation despite the serious assaults perpetrated against them by their father;
- police attitudes that the violence was only reported by their mother, Olga Edwards, because there were family law proceedings on foot;
- failure to consider John Edwards' extensive history of violence against children and partners from former relationships;
- failure to follow NSW Police Force Domestic Violence Standard Operating Procedures;
- failings leading to a gun licence being granted to John Edwards the following year.

Women's Legal Service NSW, Community Legal Centres NSW and Domestic Violence NSW call for an urgent inquiry into police responses top down, bottom up.

"Community legal centres work daily with women and children experiencing domestic violence who receive an inadequate response from police. The current inquest shows there are times that police do not follow their own policies and fail to have regard for the lethality risk factors," says Arlia Fleming, Chair, Community Legal Centres NSW.

"We understand the coronial inquest is still underway. But this is not an isolated incident. Urgent action is required now. We call on the Minister for Police to immediately establish an independent inquiry into police response to domestic and sexual violence. We must find ways to improve police response to ensure the safety of children and women. Children and women's lives depend on it. The time for action is now," says Ms Fleming.

"We also need regular comprehensive audits of policing of domestic violence in NSW. This is what the NSW Ombudsman recommended in 2011 and the recommendation is still to be implemented," says Liz Snell, Law Reform and Policy Co-ordinator, Women's Legal Service NSW.

"Regular audits of policing of sexual, domestic and family violence are important because they can highlight gaps in police responses and identify steps which can be taken to improve policing and ultimately, the safety of victims of such violence who are primarily children and women. It's imperative that the community has trust in the police response. Regular audits can increase that trust because they signal that police take seriously their responsibilities and are interested to reflect and improve practices where it is required," says Ms Snell.

"We know police are hugely under resourced and seek for this to be urgently reviewed and rectified, if we are to address these serious matters that have had tragic consequences." Says Delia Donovan, Interim CEO, DVNSW.

There are regular audits of policing of domestic violence in the United Kingdom which have helped to improve policing of domestic violence.

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#### Background

NSW Ombudsman (2011) [Audit of NSW Police Force handling of domestic and family violence complaints](#)