

THE LODDON CONSORTIUM

— FOR GENDER EQUALITY + VIOLENCE PREVENTION —

23 February, 2022

Enough is enough. That's the message from women, everywhere.

They've had enough of their voices not being heard. Their stories not being believed.

Their history, silenced.

Their calls for action ignored.

And they're angry.

But – the tide may be turning! Amazing women are doing amazing things and using their voice - growing a social movement to end violence and demand gender and social equality.

Following the incredible speeches by Grace Tame and Brittany Higgins at the National Press Club on 9 February 2022, where they spoke passionately and held our leaders to account for their inaction and failure to demonstrate leadership, our community is ready to agitate and get loud again!

A local event organised by community members will be taking place at Rosalind Park on Sunday 27 February – gathering at 11.00am in the Piazza.

However, there are some community members who may not be able to participate at this event due to the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 or because they live too far away. We encourage our local community and the broader Australian community to March 4 Justice again – in person if possible – or, online through social media campaigns.

In the days leading up to Sunday 27 February, we will be calling on our local community to join us and share the online campaign and to reflect on the experiences of victim survivors of sexual assault and other forms of abuse. We also encourage our community to join an in-person event if possible, to show their support.

Everyone knows a woman who has been sexually assaulted or abused.

Since the last March 4 Justice more and more women (and some men) are talking about experiences throughout their lives – and realising that those experiences were sexual assault, grooming or abuse.

They have been living in silence for too long. Sitting with the impact alone – because we have created a society where talking about sexual assault is taboo. Where the fear and shame of being blamed or judged has stopped people from seeking help.

This is the society we have created. Where victims are silenced by their perpetrator, the system and then by their community.

Sexual assault happens in every demographic, and women of all ages and backgrounds are more likely to be victims than men.

It is hard to hear their stories.

But how you feel should not be the reason someone does not feel safe to disclose what happened to them. Nor should how you feel silence them.

As a community it's time for us to really listen to victim survivors – and ask, what are we doing to contribute to a community that continues to make excuses for those who abuse them.

If every one of us knows a victim survivor, we know perpetrators.

How have you heard perpetrators being excused?

Why aren't we getting angry that the more people disclose they have been victims of sexual or other violence, the more we hear excuses for the "good bloke". Why aren't we getting more angry at the lack of leadership and change? As the 2021 Australian of the Year, survivor of sexual assault and activist Grace Tame said on 9 February "Repeatedly this year, I have seen the patterns of deception and deceit performed by predators mimicked in our halls of power. Facades and false hope. Reviews, reports, delays and distractions – if not downright denials".

We need more from our leaders. Brittany Higgins on 9 February stated that the Prime Minister's response to her rape allegation after being counselled by his wife was disappointing. She said "I didn't want his sympathy as a father. I wanted him to use his power as Prime Minister".

This is the crux of the issue. We support the broad aims of March 4 Justice and call on our leaders – who control structures, power and resources – to pursue political, legal and social change – backed up with funding and resources to ensure we achieve an equal, safe and fair society for everyone.

It's time to make noise again – so let's get loud!

March 4 Justice – Online Campaign

Consortium members will be running a social media campaign in the days leading up to 27 February.

Please join us and share the content. Slide pack attached.

March 4 Justice2 – Bendigo Rally

11.00am, Piazza, Rosalind Park, Bendigo – wear black and a splash of teal. Further information available from: https://www.facebook.com/events/1591304317906070/?active_tab=about

Media Commentary

Please contact Margaret Augerinos (on behalf of the Consortium) on 0418 544 045.

Quotes attributable to members of the consortium follow:

"Another year has gone by. If not for the incredible voice and advocacy of people like Grace Tame and Brittany Higgins, these issues would have disappeared from public view. Our Federal Government needs to do better, and more, to address these critical issues". (Margaret Augerinos, CEO, Centre for Non-Violence)

"The time for change has come. Survivor voices cannot be ignored any more. Our community is demanding change. We want justice and equality." (Kate Wright, CEO, CASA Central Victoria)

“Gender inequality is the leading driver for gendered violence. We must address these drivers to ensure we can achieve safety and gender equality. These changes need to take place at political and social and community levels.” (Tricia Currie, Executive Officer, Women’s Health Loddon Mallee)

“Daily we see the impacts of inequality and gendered violence. The voices of survivors must be at the forefront of our political and social responses. Our services need extra capacity to meet the needs of survivors. We simply cannot tolerate turning survivors away from critical services because we can’t meet demand”. (Julie Oberin, CEO, Annie North Women’s Refuge)

“Community conversations must shift from protecting and excusing the perpetrator to believing victim survivors. Only then can we start to work towards tackling the problems we see at all levels in our community head on”. (Julie Landy, Acting CEO, Sunbury & Cobaw Community Health)

The Consortium recognises these conversations are difficult for victim survivors and encourages you to reach out to support services.

We also encourage all members of the community to connect with women in your life, as current events may be impacting on them more than you are aware.

Centre Against Sexual Assault Central Victoria – (03) 5441 0430

Sexual Assault Crisis Line – 1800 806 292

1800 RESPECT – 1800 737 732

Centre for Non-Violence – 1800 884 292

24 hour statewide Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre crisis line – 1800 015 188

In an emergency call 000