

# A flood of support: Rotary's nationwide campaign to combat domestic violence

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In Ballina, a Rotary club is changing the community's understanding and response to domestic and family violence. The club organised a groundbreaking community walk in 2019 that attracted over 800 participants to raise awareness about such violence.

Leveraging our background in education and its crucial role to instigate long-term behavioural change, my wife, Robyn, and I initiated the Rotary club's support for the delivery of the Love Bites Respectful Relationships education program in local schools.

In 2022, the floods in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales left thousands of people without homes. Financial and emotional stress were playing out negatively on relationships. It felt like boiling point across the community as people and families



The 'NO to Domestic and Family Violence and YES to Respectful Relationships' t-shirts were distributed through local Rotary clubs.

Image: Jodie Shelly

lived in their cars or in tents. There was a lot of pressure on families. Incidents of domestic and family violence emerged or escalated and the township of Ballina experienced a family violence death in January 2023. In response, the Rotary Club of Ballina-on-Richmond worked with its partner, Cherry Street Sports Group, to launch the Purple Friday campaign.

This initiative received funding to distribute purple shirts bearing the message 'NO to Domestic and Family Violence and YES to Respectful Relationships' to businesses, schools and community members. The campaign quickly gained momentum and over 90 businesses, schools and community groups in Ballina participated by wearing the shirts each Friday.

Spurred by this success, I proposed extending the campaign across Australia, New Zealand and to the Pacific Islands by reaching out 19 Rotary district governors across Rotary Zone 8. All 19 governors adopted the campaign, which was the first time in 40 years that Rotary in Zone 8 (covering 16 countries) adopted a common cause or project. This signifies how seriously Rotary views the devastating effects of domestic violence on communities.

Rotary clubs nationwide embraced the campaign and organised 110 activities dedicated to combating domestic and family violence. I forged partnerships with stakeholders including New South Wales Police and the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, which proved a great partnership to tackle this societal issue. I believe this is a whole-of-community problem that will take a whole-of-community approach to bring about positive change including shifting accountability for men's violence against women to men.

We must combine our efforts, resources and energy to address this scourge and, in doing so, create hope in the world. This campaign has great potential for the emergency services sector to join in to say 'no' to domestic violence, as emergency services personnel are often regarded as role models for young men and women. Imagine the influence they could have in our society by rejecting violence and supporting respectful relationships.

More information about the Love Bites Respectful Relationships project is available at <https://rotaryclubofballinaonrichmond.org.au/rotary-zone-8>.



Staff at Cherry St Sports Group wearing purple shirts for Purple Friday.

Image: Jodie Shelly