

**Name:** Christine McInerney-Percy, Shoalhaven Labor Ward 2 Candidate.

**1. What is your understanding of what constitutes violence against women:**

My understanding of violence against women is in line with the UN's declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women i.e.

*'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, theatre occurring in public or private life'.*

**a. In the community?**

I have worked as a Community Worker for the last nine years, and most of my work has involved working with women, primarily mothers, who face or have violence in the form of DFV. DFV isn't just a low social-economic issue; it can affect women in any circumstances. Many women I have worked with didn't understand that they were facing DV, thinking that their partner had to hit them or have normalised their partner's behaviour due to this being a generational issue. The training I received, including DV-alert by LifeLine, enabled me to work with women in a compassionate and supportive way and it enabled me to enlighten/educate my clients.

DV/violence against women in our community is rife and its repercussions affect the entire community. The #MeToo movement, awareness, media highlighting the issue and even TV series like The Maid on Netflix, has helped educate the community, perpetrators and victims. More awareness, training and education is needed for workers, women, men and youth - starting with education about respectful relationships.

**b. In workplaces such as local government?**

Violence against women in the workplace should not be tolerated. Especially by our elected officials. One of the reasons I am running is to get rid of certain misogynistic male Councillors at Shoalhaven City Council. It is also the thing I'm most scared of, especially if we do not get a progressive majority at Council at the upcoming election.

I know about some Councillors' disgusting behaviours and attitudes towards female Councilors and especially our currently Mayor Amanda Findlay for some time now, and I have seen it first hand at meetings. I was horrified to hear that four female Councillors from all political persuasions left chambers due to derogatory comments and misogynist bullying in March this year. This is unacceptable. These male Councillors should have been disciplined and would have been relieved of their duties in any other workplace.

*"The meeting had run ... with a particular male councillor making constant derogatory comments about the mayor ... misogynist bullying is alive and thriving unchecked in Shoalhaven City Council." "By the end of it, we were so sick of it that we just left," said Cr Annette Alldrick*

Illawarra Mercury, 8 March 2021

**2. If you are elected as a Councillor on 4 September, what would you perceive to be your role in mitigating the incidence of violence against women:**

**a. In the community?**

I think Councillors have a role to play locally advocating for services for women, funding education programs, and assisting housings (DA, use of Council own land, etc.) and

intervention services. I work for a large charity in my paid job, and we engage with philanthropic organizations to fund projects. I know that Council also does this but is not as successful as others. Council workers are hampered by decisions made by Councillors who don't appear to put the interests of women and children in their decision-making processes. I believe the Council should make gender-based violence, in particular DFV, a focus along with the current affordable housing crisis, affecting many women leaving DFV.

**b. In workplaces such as local government?**

I will not tolerate the behaviours displayed by current Councillors, and I will call it out. I also know John Kotlash, who is our lead candidate, will not tolerate it and has also been calling it out in the lead up to this election. As a Councillor, I hope to inspire other women to be political and become advocates for their community. The treatment of women, especially at the federal level, has made my run for Council even more critical. Violence against women is an issue that affects everyone, and I believe this issue and its impacts can be addressed by Council and should be a priority issue.

**3. Are there instances in your life or career where you have become aware of, and taken action to mitigate the incidence of violence against women? If so, could you please describe these instances?**

The #MeToo movement was an eye-opener for me, even though I had been working with women in DFV situations for a while it was still shocking to me. At the time, I had a heart to heart with my sisters, and I was shocked to find out that my sisters and I had all faced sexual assault in various forms in our younger years. My sexual assault was something that I hadn't acknowledged until that time, I was ashamed, I blamed myself and never considered until then that this was a form of sexual assault; I know this to be true for many other women. From then I became even more vocal about violence against women.

In my role as the Facilitator at Sanctuary Point Connect from 2013 to 2021 I was able to empower women, provide them support, referrals and education. I called out the BS they faced from partners and didn't judge them for their decisions. Connect became a haven for women and their children. When possible, I employed women who were in or were previously affected by DFV. The effects of DFV don't just stop after a women leaves. At Connect, I was able to assist many mothers by being referees for housing applications and employment. I supplied letters of support for court proceedings and I worked with other organizations to provide supports with parenting, nutrition and more.

**4. How could the Shoalhaven City Council Strategic Plan better address the issue of violence against women in the Shoalhaven local government area?**

The Council Strategic Plan notes that it is based upon five principles, one of which is Social Justice. In this principle, they include equality and rights. The Social Justice Principal should be amended to include a section on freedom from gender-based violence.

I note that Domestic Violence is referred to in the CSP's Theme number 1, "Resilient, safe and inclusive communities", but it's not expanded upon, and no specific measurements are noted. I believe gender-based violence should be mentioned in this section and expanded upon. By its inclusion, Councillors and council employees would have a basis to make this a priority area and start the change process.