Speech by Annette King, Minister of Justice, the Minister of Police and the Minister of Transport, New Zealand to launch

Jan Jordan’s Serial Survivors - Women’s Narratives of Surviving Rape

It is a pleasure to join you all for the launch of Jan’s book today. Thank you to Jenny and the School of Social and Cultural Studies for your invitation and for hosting today’s event. It is wonderful to see so many people gathered in support of Jan and her work.

I have read one of Jan’s previous books, ‘Working Girls: Women in the New Zealand Sex Industry’, and found it to be not only incredibly interesting, but informative and challenging. Jan manages to explore sensitive issues that have not previously been written about in depth, and she does so with an enormous amount of respect and compassion.

‘Serial Survivors’ is no different. It is an inspirational account of survival and resilience, and I want to pay tribute to the brave women who so generously agreed to be interviewed by Jan and openly share their experiences with her.

I would also like to acknowledge the Federation Press in Sydney for their decision to publish Jan’s book, thereby ensuring that these survivors have their stories heard.

The sad and chilling reality is that there are far too many victims of sexual violence in New Zealand society. I am told that research has shown that in a group the size of which is here today, there will be 12 or 13 of you who will have experienced sexual violence at some time in your life.

Unlike many of the survivors in Jan’s book though, most victims of sexual violence know their offenders; they have worked alongside them, they have lived with them, they have socialised amongst them. As we all know, sexual violence is more likely to be committed by a person known to the victim.

The 2006 New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey found that over one-third of sexual offences were committed by current partners; just over one in ten involved a boyfriend or girlfriend; a quarter involved a friend, and one in twenty incidents involved a work colleague.

The effects of such violence on victims and the people close to them are significant and often underestimated. Sexual violence impacts considerably on every aspect of a survivor’s life --- their physical, emotional and social well-being. Jan refers to ‘survival journeys’ in her book. The reality is that these journeys continue throughout a lifetime.

Jan’s book demonstrates that although there are often common themes and stages in a victims’ survival journey, the process of recovery and healing is individual to each survivor. We should not hold expectations about how survivors of such violence will react, how they will behave in the situations they face during the act of violence and in the aftermath that follows.

‘Serial Survivors’ provides victims with a tool to assist them in their journey of survival. It provides validation that there is no single ‘right path’ to healing and it provides hope that, despite the enormous challenges ahead, recovery is possible.

As lead Minister of the Sexual Violence Ministerial Group and as Minister of both Police and Justice I am committed to making real progress on sexual violence — to change these appalling statistics, to challenge the attitudes and beliefs that allow sexual violence to be perpetuated in our society and to support survivors the best way we can in their journeys towards healing and recovery.
The Taskforce for Action on Sexual Violence is undertaking substantial work on a wide range of areas to achieve these goals. The Government established the Taskforce in July last year, acknowledging that a multi-agency and government-community partnership was needed to make real progress.

Collaborative work needs to be undertaken on policy and practice for prevention, on services for victims, for offender management and treatment and for support for victims going through the criminal justice system.

In all these areas good work is being done by the Taskforce, by the ten government agencies that support it, and by the Government’s partner on the Taskforce - Te Ohaakii A Hine-National Network Ending Sexual Violence Together (known as ‘TOAH NNEST’). TOAH NNEST is the official body that provides community organisational representation on the Taskforce.

Jan is a member of TOAH NNEST and many of you are probably unaware that, despite juggling an already heavy workload with her university responsibilities, and writing ‘Serial Survivors’, Jan played an important role in the initial stages of the Taskforce.

Jan took part in the inaugural hui held between government officials and community representatives in March last year. The hui provided a forum for gaining community views and expert advice on the shape and scope of the Taskforce. This feedback and advice ultimately developed into the Terms of Reference. Jan also presented to the Taskforce at its workshop in September to help members identify priority areas for action and the Taskforce work programme.

The work of the Taskforce will, I believe, set the foundation for significant improvements in outcomes for victims and assist in their healing and long term recovery. However, it is only through survivors sharing their experiences --- like those in Jan’s book --- that we can know where to direct our focus. Only those who have been subjected to sexual violence can tell us what their realities are, what kind of support they require and the best way to deliver services.

Speaking out and talking about sexual violence is important for our community on so many levels. Perpetrators of sexual violence rely on their victim's silence to avoid being held to account for the damage they do. They rely on their seeming ability to transfer the shame of their crime to the victim of their offending, but if we are to have a society free from sexual violence then we can’t just focus on changing perpetrators' attitudes alone.

We need to challenge the attitudes of those who would prefer to sweep this issue under the carpet or those who think victims are somehow to blame or who think it is a problem for someone else to solve. By remaining silent, we are sending a message that this behaviour is acceptable in some way.

Survivors need to be empowered, to feel safe to talk about their experience and disclose offending.

Only then can both survivors and the public see that justice is being done and that this behaviour is not tolerated in our society. Work with survivors, such as the research that Jan has undertaken, helps us identify and understand how policies and practices can be improved.

This leads me to my next point. This is the perfect opportunity to recognise that the work of Jan and her colleagues plays an important role in the development of good evidence based policy. Research undertaken here at Victoria University through the
Crime and Justice Research Centre and at other academic institutions across New Zealand is vital in this respect.

A key objective of the Taskforce is to establish a sound base of evidence to underpin decision making about future investments to improve prevention and responses to sexual violence. In my job as Minister I want to ensure that policy decisions make a real and tangible difference in the lives of New Zealanders. The Government needs to understand clearly which policies and initiatives work most effectively.

The research currently being carried out by the Centre, commissioned by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, is a good example of research designed to make a real difference. It will look at improving the likelihood of victims making a complaint, supporting victims through the criminal justice system, and at the types of interventions that best support victims.

Again, it is information gathered from *survivors* that will add real value to data gathered through this research.

Survivors can also provide important perspectives on the prevention of sexual violence. Some of you may be aware that the government has recently prioritised funding for exactly this purpose. A new advisor position for one year has been established, to ensure that the voices of sexual abuse survivors are given their rightful prominence in work to prevent sexual violence and abuse.

This advisor will work with government and sector agencies, and have a role in supporting national initiatives such as the Taskforce for Action on Sexual Violence. The advisor’s key task will be to widen understanding of the impact of sexual violence and abuse, providing a survivor perspective and a survivor-focus.

I am pleased to announce today that the Ministry of Justice, through the Crime Prevention Unit, will be allocating $700,000 to the non-government sector for the prevention of sexual violence over the next two years from its core crime prevention funding. In addition to supporting the establishment of the adviser position, targeting of the rest of the funding will be determined in consultation with the secretariat of the Taskforce.

I want to thank community organisations like those involved in TOAH NNEST for their continued hard work and dedication. The services provided by these organisations are integral to the ongoing battle against sexual violence and to survivor healing, and the government values their commitment.

I believe that we are on the cusp of an important change in how sexual violence is addressed in this country. We will know that we are making progress when we see an increase in reporting of sexual violence, an increase in trust in the criminal justice system and survivors feel supported in their healing and recovery.

Jan, thank you again for all that you have done and continue to do through your research, your on-going contribution to the Taskforce, your regular presentations to Police sexual assault training courses, and, most importantly today, your completion of this important book. I am privileged to be part of this launch. 21 May 2008