

## ZONTA CLUB OF OAMARU, WHITE RIBBON DAY ESSAY COMPETITION

**Winner: Keely McLeod, East Otago High School**

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### ***It's not Okay! But what are you going to do about it?***

*Another day, waking up. What will he do today? What crime will I commit in his mind?*

It's a question asked by many women in this day in age and a cruel fact that domestic violence towards women even exists, not just in New Zealand, but worldwide. It comes in many different forms from physical abuse to psychological. Every kind of abuse will leave scars emotionally and physically.

Is it right that someone is abusive? Is it right that someone is abused? Is it right that someone is allowed to stand idly to the side and allow this horror to occur in their neighbourhood and do nothing?

We all know it's wrong. We all know it's happening. We all know something needs to change. We all know what needs to change: the levels of domestic abuse targeted at women.

But the question we're all asking is: how? How can we change such a big issue that comes in so many forms, attacking so many people.

Please don't think that it's only a few women being abused by partners or family members or anyone else. It's more than a few. Statistics don't lie. In 2010, 4858 applicants asked for protection orders. 91% of those applicants were female. Each day, a standard court will deal with 20 prosecutions of assault on women, actioned by men. This is a very real issue that cannot be ignored.

But the question keeps popping up: how do we fix this? It's not simple.

It's through education and rebelling against what we know and maintaining the habits we haven't learnt, but are learning.

Change comes through changing. Nothing changes if everything's still the same and you can't expect it to.

Women's Refuge is an internationally known organization for the protection of women and children from domestic violence. But here's another shocking statistic: Women's Refuge received 60,565 crisis calls between 2010 and 2011 and provided protection services to 13,937 women and children. These are massive numbers and we don't know how many women that don't contact Women's Refuge or the Police are out there.

Abuse is not to simply hurt or manipulate. It is for power, to feel strong, for control. Call abuse a war between two or more. That's what World Wars are based on, power and control. It's what domestic violence stems from as well.

Abuse is like a tree, it starts off small, like a seed. But the seed grows and the trunk erupts and branches sprout out every where. The trunk is the man demanding power. He's big, he's powerful and he has influence over the branches, the people, the women he hurts.

This particular tree has a disease. We don't kill the tree until it's too late, when the branches are gone, and nothing more worthy is left except a man thrown in jail because he flew into a rage because a woman didn't do this or that right. But before the tree can get a chance to be infected with the abusive disease, we treat it, a prevention. Not a cure. A cure is what we get when it's happening or after.

A prevention is what we receive before. Women don't need a cure. They need prevention in the power of both men and women receiving education, support from others and access to help organizations such as Women's Refuge and It's Not Okay.

Now, I'm not personally aware of anyone I know being abused in any shape or form at this current moment. But I know people that have been abused and I most likely know someone who knows someone who is being abused right now.

*She gets a slap in the face. It's just a slap. She won't do it again and he won't hit her again, over that or anything else. He didn't mean to. Right?*

It's human nature to want to see the best in people and believe that they're just human and you can't expect them not to get angry over anything. But it can be expected that they're aren't going to call you 'fat' or 'slut', hit you around, rape you, or tell you you're not worth anything or that it was a mistake you having been born.

It is right to expect that you can leave whenever you want, for your own safety.

*Another day, waking up. What will I do today? What can I do to help?*

What can I do to help abuse be stopped? Will I ignore it, put my head down and walk on? No. I will raise my hand and say that I am against violence towards women (anyone, actually) and encourage others to see through the hazy mist in which we live and rise above and raise their hand too. I will wake up and smile and smile through the hard times because they won't hard compared to what other teenage girls experience.

Life is cruel, but the people within don't have to be. We can stop those who are cruel and violent. One person who raises their hand is influential. Just raise your hand, open your eyes, seek out those are desperate to seek out you, even if they don't know it, and say 'I am against domestic violence against women'. Mean it in your heart and action those words.

I am a mere fifteen year old girl with not much knowledge of the world, but I do know what is acceptable and I will or won't accept. And I won't accept violence.

Many organizations such as sports clubs and businesses advocate the It's Not Okay theme, putting it out there, making everyday citizens know of what occurs.

It isn't hard to find it. See a man who pushes his girlfriend because she didn't agree with him. See that girl stumble and her face fall like rain. See the evidence of abuse. It cannot be ignored. I can't ignore it. Will you ignore the truth?

*Another day, waking up. What will **you** do? What will **you** do to help?*

