



## My Story, My Time

Family and domestic violence affects one in every six women in Australia. Ruah is empowering women affected by family and domestic violence to share their story.

We hope this will change how family violence is reported in the media, and talked about in the community.

*"I was belittled. I was controlled. Now, I am free."*

**RUAH**

COMMUNITY SERVICES

*Open Hearts. Bold Strides.*

# Meet the Advocates

A group of inspirational women, who have been affected by domestic violence, are sharing their stories and speaking about their experiences to drive change.

## Catherine

*"As a victim, you've been psychologically manipulated to be that way; it's no way to live."*

Don't ask Catherine why she didn't leave – ask her partner why he chose to be violent! Her bruises and broken bones may have healed, but Catherine (34) is still recovering from the violence inflicted on her mind and soul; something she never wants her daughter or any other woman to experience. She is determined to teach her children and future generations about the drivers of domestic violence.

## Azelene

Determined to break the silence, Azelene has published a book about her experience and is a passionate advocate for ending domestic violence. She runs a healthy relationships school and community-based program and is regularly approached by women and teenagers who disclose their own experiences of family or intimate partner violence. As a qualified holistic counsellor, wife and mother, Azelene knows education is a critically important part of the solution.

## Grace

Grace\* deed polled her surname to one of the most common names in the world – it has kept her safe, but it's also made ordering fish and chips interesting! Having experienced violence as a child and in two previous relationships, Grace believes the solution to ending domestic violence lies in the community. What questions need to be asked to change the statistics? What would make a place, a community or a nation free of domestic violence?

## Tinashe

A young student travelling for the chance of an education, Tinashe left behind a country known for condoning domestic violence. It was the very last thing she expected would be part of her life in Australia.

## Champo

*"Most cultures believe a woman has to build a home, so if the relationship breaks down then it's a woman's fault."*

Champo will share the paralysing moment she saw herself in the women in her therapy group and realised that she too was a victim of domestic violence. Through her work as a Health Promotion Officer, and from her own personal experience, Champo (39) is educating the community that violence is a choice, and that perpetrators can make different choices.

## Rehab

Education and employment opportunities set a path for Rehab to build a new life for herself; a life beyond 40 that had hope, choice and light – and wasn't a daily exercise in risk management. No longer does Rehab walk on eggshells or suppress her true self. She is a proud Muslim woman, a mother, friend, survivor and social worker who is committed to making a difference in women's lives.

## Relle

*"It was always portrayed that I had done something to make him behave in that manner."*

The abuse of power and control by her partner meant that Relle lived for many years in fear, too afraid to be herself. What started as an exciting and loving relationship resulted in a complete destruction of her soul, and of who she was as a person.

## Sheree

The oldest of five children, Sheree spent her childhood protecting her siblings from the abuse inflicted on her mother. At the age of 16, she found herself in a loving relationship that soon became physically, emotionally, mentally and sexually abusive. Sheree found the courage to break the cycle to protect her children. She lives on high alert and is still healing, but Sheree is determined to speak out for those who can't.

## Nicola

*"This is the first year I have reclaimed me."*

Having established a successful career, Nicola is determined to shift mindsets and improve community awareness about domestic violence becoming a published author and a strong advocate for change. Nicola is not just a domestic violence survivor. At age 52, and 15 years after her relationship ended, she wants people to see beyond the trauma and draw hope from her experience.

## Samantha

*"My story pales in significance ... or so I thought."*

Samantha heard the voices and saw the fists raised, but mostly the abuse of family members happened behind closed doors. It was shame that hid the brutality they suffered.

Samantha knew that was their experience; it wasn't her story. She was the lucky one ... until she discovered that she was also routinely abused during her 35 year relationship. There were no missing teeth, no broken bones or bruises but instead years and years of deception, forgery and lies – all part of the so-called 'hidden side' of domestic violence. The extent of deception Samantha suffered was not only heartbreaking but resulted in a complete breakdown of confidence and trust in almost everything and everyone. Nothing was as it seemed.

## Kat

*"By the time I was 23, I had been sexually abused, assaulted and traumatised. My understanding of relationships was maladaptive and not functional."*

Kat's many professional and community roles have given her a strong understanding of the guilt and shame associated with family and domestic violence. A curiosity about her family history uncovered generations of toxic behaviour, trauma and dark secrets. Kat is making sure her children know that some 'secrets' are not meant to be kept.

To engage these women, or learn more about the My Story, My Time initiative, please contact Ruah.