

Meet the men determined to stop violence against Indigenous women

mobile.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-25/far-north-qld-community-approach-to-ending-domestic-violence/8049968

Brendan Mounter

Gregory Omeenyo



Gregory Omeenyo, a coordinator at the Lockhart River men's shelter, says economic development is key to tackling family violence in remote communities.

ABC Far North Queensland: [Brendan Mounter](#)

Kanthanampu man and Lockhart River traditional owner Gregory Omeenyo returned to his community from a 17-year stint in the army determined to make a difference.

"I came back into the community a different person, looking at the outer world in terms of giving help back to the community," Mr Omeenyo said.

Once the youngest elected councillor on Lockhart River Aboriginal Council, he is now a coordinator at Ngachii Kinchya Puuya Kuunitha, a men's shelter for young men to "cool down" and talk.

"If they've got some social issues at home they come up here and cool off, just to get away from their problems in the community," Mr Omeenyo said.

"It comes back to their mental and social health, being open amongst each other and getting that trust between men; where you see in the communities in Cape York, it's a more of a shame issue."

Social pressures contribute to family violence

Domestic violence is prevalent in Cape York Aboriginal communities, where too many people live under the one roof and job prospects for young men are bleak.

"Domestic violence isn't just domestic violence. There's other [factors] around that ... in terms of anger, there's a lot of factors that get the boys upset," Mr Omeenyo said.

"It's not only in Lockhart [River], it's all over the Cape.

Family and domestic violence support services:

"It's a wide range of things when you look at it from a community perspective like crowded houses. You've got unemployment and you've got other issues.

"Since people have moved into communities, it's been hard for men to actually be open about things, whereas in their own environment, their homelands, in terms of their cultural needs, they feel more open out there because they have a sense of responsibility."

While the men's shelter plays a role in educating young men and breaking the silence around family violence, Mr Omeenyo said economic development was key to breaking the cycle and giving men purpose.

Economic empowerment important in changing lives

Lockhart River Aboriginal Council has embarked on a number of initiatives to inspire a sense of local entrepreneurship, including a [local roadworks programs](#) and [supporting start-ups](#) to deliver council services.

"In terms of capacity building, looking at small businesses, trying to get boys trained up to be getting proper jobs, that's made a bit of freedom for the men," Mr Omeenyo said.

"In the past, our old people did things for themselves, there was a system in place in terms of governing.

"We should stand up and show that Lockhart [River] can manage things for themselves."

Peterson Opio



Peterson Opio leads the ambassador program for White Ribbon Australia and is working with the young men of AFL Cape York House.

Ten years ago, Petersen Opio was shooting hoops for the Cairns Taipans.

Now he is teaching the young men at AFL Cape York House respect for women in his role as an ambassador for White Ribbon Australia.

"For me, the opportunity to see the change in men and to see the positive ways men can get involved in preventing violence against women is really important," Mr Opio said.

"I think that's the key to changing the mindset of men's violence against women, getting in early and educating our young people.

"These are the crucial times in which we're able to shape their future activity."

Mr Opio is delivering the Breaking the Silence Schools Program at AFL Cape York House, a boarding house that provides educational, employment and training opportunities for young Indigenous men from some of far north Queensland's remotest communities.

Developing young leaders for better futures



Peterson Opio with some of the young men of AFL Cape York House.

The prevalence of domestic violence throughout Cape York means young men are commonly exposed to poor behaviours, which is why positive role modelling and creating young leaders is critical to creating generational change.

"For a lot of these young men, they're already seen as role models. They're influencing not only their peers, but those also back home in their community," Mr Opio said.

"[They need to be] given the tools and given the opportunity to stand on a platform to say 'Respectful relationships are healthy, harmonious interactions with both men and women'.

"Above all else, [they'll become] a good global citizen."

Changing young minds a personal mission

Aboriginal women's lives do matter

It should not require Four Corners to expose the failure of our justice system in dealing with domestic violence towards Aboriginal women, writes Antoinette Braybrook.

Mr Opio's work has become a personal mission since he became a father.

"Being a father for the first time, I recognise the importance of being a role model in my community and also a role model in my home, so that when my son grows up, he has the ideals of respect and promoting inclusion in his own DNA," Mr Opio said.

"I want my child to be a positive agent of change. If I can impart on him some respectful ways in which he can do that, then I'm doing my job in my society."



Jim Millar



Jim Millar is raising money to support the family of Tyler Ratcliffe, a boy he coached whose mother was killed last month.

ABC Far North Queensland: Brendan Mounter

Last month, 38-year-old Crystal Ratcliffe was allegedly stabbed to death in the Cairns suburb of Woree.

Her partner Ricky Cowan has been charged with her murder .

Ms Ratcliffe's death hit close to home for Jim Millar, who had coached her 16-year-old son Tyler through his junior rugby league days.

Mr Millar said the allegations in the case had opened his eyes to concerns of family violence in the community.

"I suppose we all live in a bit of a bubble, not realising how bad [family violence] is," he said.

"In the last 12 months, half a million Australian women reported [abuse] at the hands of domestic violence, and that's just the ones that have been reported.

"It's a blight on our society."

Mr Millar has started an [appeal for Tyler and his 13-year-old sister Ruby](#), and has so far raised \$10,000 for the children's ongoing welfare.

He urged people to give to this cause or others like it, and said even a small donation would mean being invested in standing up to a devastating societal issue.

Fact file: Domestic violence

[Fact Check scrutinised available data on domestic violence and talked to experts to present this guide to what the data does, and does not, show.](#)

"It raises awareness ... if it touches your heart, it doesn't matter whether it's a dollar or five dollars, whatever you can afford," he said.

"[Tyler and Ruby] are going to need all the help they can throughout their formative years, to be able to go to school and just do the normal things kids do."

Mr Millar said men needed to take responsibility for their actions to break the cycle, something he himself had to do as a man.

"Unfortunately, if it happens to a kid, sometimes that's carried on to the next generation," he said.

"I grew up with not such a great father ... but I've managed to break that mould and I've never lifted a hand to my kids."

Mr Millar said the rugby league community in particular had an important role to play in changing behaviours.

"Being the demographic that it [caters for], we can make people more aware — the patrons, the players, the officials — that domestic violence should not be part of our society," he said.

Dyral Lui





Dyrall Lui wants to study social work so he can make a difference in his Yam Island community.

ABC Far North: Sam Davis

Dyrall Lui is a young man from Yam Island and is house captain at AFL Cape York House.

He is involved in a number of programs at school and the house to develop an understanding of domestic violence and how to respect women, including the [Stand Up Against Domestic Violence High Tea last month](#) , which raised \$4,000 for various crisis services.

The 17-year-old met with family violence advocate Kristy McKellar and heard her harrowing story, which he could relate to.

"I've been through [similar experiences] to the stories that were told and I had flashbacks about my families, but it was good to see that I wasn't the only person to go through those situations," he said.

Mr Lui said it was important that young men like himself became leaders in their community, and took a proactive role in tackling family violence.

"I want to go to Darwin to study social work, so I can work with young people and old people so we can work together as a community and make a difference," he said.