



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

**FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT**

**Private Members' Statements**

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2 May 2017

**WALLSEND WOMAN OF THE YEAR**

**Ms SONIA HORNERY ( Wallsend ) ( 12:33 ):** I pay tribute to the many hard-working, trailblazing women throughout history who have taken a stand on gender equality, while at the same time acknowledging that much still needs to be done. International Women's Day is held on 8 March, and was first celebrated in 1909. It is an opportunity to acknowledge the achievements of women in all walks of life and to promote the core message of gender equality. Tomika Riley was recently named the Wallsend Local Woman of the Year at a special award ceremony held at Darling Harbour.

It was with great joy that I was able to honour Tomika for her work in our community. Tomika is a volunteer with the Newcastle branch of Friends With Dignity, a not-for-profit organisation that provides help to people escaping domestic violence and abusive situations, to set up new homes and new lives. When a family leaves a refuge and is able to finally secure some housing, they often do not have any household items that most of us take for granted, and that is where Ms Riley and Friends With Dignity step in.

Tomika works to assist by offering non-perishable foods, toiletries, clothing, furniture and toys to help them make a house a home. Tomika has worked tirelessly in our community as a volunteer with the Newcastle branch of Friends With Dignity helping those people in desperate need of a fresh start in life. Tomika and her dedicated team of volunteers support victims of domestic violence to turn houses into welcoming sanctuaries and rebuild their lives with purpose, dignity and hope. Everything to fill the home is donated. This includes furniture, bedding, linen, kitchenware, electrical goods, white-goods and toys, collected on a needs basis.

Occasionally they will also put out a call for donations of school supplies, such as books, bags and drink bottles. They have a coordinated team that collect these donations, deliver them to the house and turn the empty house into a home, a sanctuary. Friends With Dignity literally turns an empty shell into a home the family can walk straight into and begin living the minute they receive the keys. And it is all done in seven days. Domestic violence has truly become an epidemic in our society—the

statistics speak for themselves. The latest New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research reports revealed that in the 24 months to September last year, reports of domestic assaults had increased by 21 per cent.

Friends with Dignity is a national not-for-profit organisation providing assistance to men, women and children who have been displaced by domestic violence. Founded by Manuela Whitford, Friends with Dignity is a dedicated team of volunteers who work with registered referral agencies to turn houses into welcoming sanctuaries for people escaping domestic violence. There are no paid positions at Friends With Dignity. Their volunteers change lives. They come from all walks of life and believe in a world where everyone should have access to a safe and loving home free from abuse. Together they give people the dignity of a home to call their own. Volunteering is important, not just for the people who benefit directly from their efforts, but for the whole community. Tomika is thoroughly deserving of recognition for all the work that she does in our community. Congratulations.