

**Young men leading the cultural change**  
**White Ribbon ambassadors Arman Abrahamzadeh and Hamish Richardson...July 2014**



Recently I met with two very impressive young men, Arman Abrahamzadeh (left above) and Hamish Richardson (right).

In November last year, at the Adelaide White Ribbon Breakfast, they were inducted as White Ribbon ambassadors. I wanted to find out how and why they decided to take up this commitment. They are leaders in the cultural change we are seeking. Many of the ambassadors are older men, so as the Soroptimist International representative on the White Ribbon Breakfast Committee, I wanted to congratulate and support them in their decision to become WR ambassadors. The third young WR ambassador Josh McManus was unavailable as he was off to China. We'll catch up later.

Hamish is a Year 12 student at CBC in the city and Arman is an architect. They approached the decision to become ambassadors through a family connection, but in different ways. Hamish's father Trevor, has been a White Ribbon ambassador for some years. Hamish and Trevor have supported SI Adelaide in the selling of white ribbons in the Central Market and also last year, gave support at our Tree of Hope event in Rundle Mall.

**Hamish in Central Market photo**

Arman became a White Ribbon ambassador following the death of his mother, in a public DV related incident, in 2010. Later on, a friend suggested that he might like to take on the role of ambassador. He said he felt he had to undo the harm which had been done by his father's mistakes. He's taken a personal stand to demonstrate acceptable behaviours to other men.

Hamish said that his interactions at school provided a good opportunity to help influence the opinions and behaviours of his peers. Arman said that with his raised awareness and own personal experience, he was keen to help other men see that verbal abuse or a slap today, might escalate to something else in a few months or a year and that other ways existed to sort issues out.

Both agreed that although attitudes have changed and moved forward in Australia, the belief still exists for some men, even in 2014, that they should be in charge of the household and controlling what's happening. These controlling behaviours are an element of domestic violence and can occur in both cultures.

We discussed too, the curious position of public violence being assault and the same action in private being called domestic violence. Why is this the case? Why don't we call it what it is? Assault. This point was raised on the SBS Insight program on which Arman appeared, in March this year.

Respectful relationships are in the Pastoral Care program at Hamish's school and others in Adelaide, along with drug and alcohol issues. His school recognises White Ribbon Day every year and in the preceding weeks, educational programs are offered, using many White Ribbon resources. He felt

personally, that the issue of violence against women was equally important as the other issues, but still considered a bit of a fringe issue.

Arman recounted the wonderful support he'd had from many people on deciding to become a White Ribbon ambassador. He said women in particular expressed their gratitude, "we didn't know guys like you, existed", when in fact he was standing up for a human rights issue. Shouldn't we all be standing up for human rights issues?

They both agreed that the impact on men was much greater when the challenge to their behaviour came from a mate, rather than from the wider society, the media, the law or a woman. Sometimes the challenge needs to be made publicly, calling inappropriate behaviour for what it is and sometimes, the challenge can be effective when done in private.

They both highlighted opportunities they took either at school, or at work, to challenge some behaviour on the spot. These incidences were dealt with on a one to one basis, but they agreed, that on occasions, lunch time jokes amongst males needed to be challenged immediately, which might be in a group setting.

On the point of the effectiveness of public campaigns, they considered the current White Ribbon campaign of "one woman a week in Australia dying as a result of violence" was a shocking, but effective campaign. Arman expressed the view that personalising the issue amongst men, asking them to stand in someone else's shoes, connected them to the issue. "What if this was your mother, sister, neighbour, work colleague?..." brought the reality home. "I find making this issue a bit more personal (when talking with the audience), almost always has a more severe & genuine reaction" he said. So he thinks this might be one way to get more younger men on board.

Are his friends interested in becoming an ambassador? Well, it seems that the perception is that this is a role for important or experienced people, or someone who is a social worker or someone of stature in the community. Perhaps we should consider this point for another day?

The "Are you OK?" program around Mental Health issues impressed Hamish because it had opened up discussions amongst people. He thought it might work for Domestic Violence.

After having interviewed Arman and Hamish, I confirmed my belief that they would be wonderful additions to the list of White Ribbon ambassadors. In cultural change, whatever it is, someone has to be a leader, someone has to be first and they are fulfilling the leadership role admirably. Let's hope there will be a long list of young men to follow in their footsteps.