

# 11

## **Activism and Advocacy**

This chapter outlines key concepts regarding activism and advocacy and highlights the experiences of sexual violence activists and advocates.

# What's in this chapter?

## **Content warning:**

This chapter mentions sexual violence, stigmatisation and discrimination.

## **Key terms:**

- Activism
- Advocacy
- Campaigning
- Ally
- Social justice
- Intersectional feminism
- Patriarchy
- Power
- Privilege

## **Key organisations mentioned:**

- The STOP Campaign
- ACT Youth Advisory Council (YAC)
- Canberra Rape Crisis Centre (CRCC)
- Initiatives for Women in Need (IWIn)
- Forcibly Displaced People Network (FDPN)
- Women's Health Matters
- Meridian
- She's A Crowd
- With You We Can
- End Rape On Campus (EROC) Australia

# What is Activism and Advocacy?

*Activism and advocacy are about having your voice heard and sparking social change. They are an aspect of the whole-of-community approach to prevention.*

These terms are often used interchangeably but have slightly different meanings. In general, an activist is someone who takes intentional action to bring about social or political change. An advocate is someone who speaks on behalf of others to encourage change and reform.

## Activism

**Activism** involves taking deliberate action on behalf of a cause to challenge societal norms and systems in order to effect social change. This includes actions like organising or attending protests, meeting with important leaders to push for policy or legal change on a particular topic or circulating petitions for signature. The term 'grassroots activism' is also often used to describe activism that occurs within local communities to create change at the local, regional and/or international level. Intersectional activism can be an extremely powerful means for providing minority groups with a voice, highlighting important civic issues and ultimately instigating political change.

## Advocacy

**Advocacy** means using your voice, skills and networks to elevate the voices of others and encourage positive change from within systems and institutions. This can include encouraging open discussions about important issues with community members, contacting local politicians or community leaders to push for policy change, volunteering for social justice organisations, or participating in social media movements to raise awareness of a particular issue.



## How to spark change

Campaigning, activism, influencing, lobbying and protesting are drawn together by the theme of change. Different ways of sparking change for issues you care about in your community at the local, regional or international level might include:

- Participating in social media campaigns
- Signing a petition
- Expressing your views to those in power, for example by writing a letter
- Organising a performance, public exhibition or hosting an event
- Contacting media
- Writing a blog
- Sharing your art
- Empowering and educating others through open conversation and learning.

## How to be an Ally to Sexual Violence Activists and Advocates

— “

*We need men to take the lead on this or to at least walk side by side with women in the fight against violence.*

” —

*Ashlee Donohue - Author, Advocate and Educator*

**Allies** have an important role to play in all forms of activism and advocacy, especially sexual violence advocacy. The more educated that people are on the importance of eliminating sexual violence and encouraging overall sexual wellbeing and safety, the less sexual violence will occur. You don't have to be a bystander forever... you can become an ally.

Strength

solidarity

Listen

listen to violence survivors.

There are many ways in which you can show your support as an ally to those who have experienced sexual violence and/or are sexual violence activists and advocates. Simple things to remember include:

1. **Stay informed and be open to learn.** Education is the most important aspect of being an ally and it is your responsibility to seek out ways to educate yourself. If someone close to you is an activist or advocate, ask questions to understand why they are passionate about the issue, why it is important and what it means to them. Your next step could then be getting involved directly with the cause or supporting them to do so.
2. **Listen.** Listen to victim-survivor activists and advocates. Listening is often the easiest yet most crucial thing allies can do. Listen to their stories, actively enquire and understand how you can make a difference or change in your own life.
3. **Seek to understand their frustration.** It is important that allies do not respond negatively towards any emotions that may arise, such as anger, sadness or frustration. Don't tell an activist or advocate to 'calm down' - anger is understandable when sexual violence is inescapable.
4. **Speak up and turn up.** Allyship does not need to start only after sexual violence impacts you personally. It is important to not silence the conversation of sexual violence, but instead accept the conversation when it arises and engage. Remember to encourage diverse voices to be heard.
5. **Ask and check in.** How can I support the activist or advocate better? Where can I learn more? What can I do to show support? How is their activism and advocacy going? Are there any progress updates that they want to share?
6. **Support the person and the cause.** As an ally, it is important to show victim-survivors that you support them. This can be done in whatever capacity you are able to and can be as simple as liking and/or sharing their social media posts, donating to their cause, turning up at events and remaining informed.

Being an ally means actively and consistently engaging with the issue. Sexual violence is always happening, regardless of whether you know a victim-survivor or not. You can be an ally through simple actions. For example, you can choose how to respond to a 'rape joke', potentially by pausing the conversation and mentioning how it's harmful. If someone makes an inappropriate comment on someone's outfit, mention how it can enable rape culture.

# Key Concepts for Activists and Advocates

— “ —  
*A lot of the anti-violence messaging and campaigns are viewed through a white lens which doesn't see Aboriginal women - the women who are impacted the most.*  
— ” —

Ashlee Donohue - Author, Advocate and Educator

## Social justice

**Social justice** means equal rights and equitable opportunities for all. Many activists and advocates are part of social justice movements, with their goals being to change the structures within society that result in people being treated unfairly or unjustly.

## Intersectional feminism

The purpose of **intersectional feminism** is to recognise how different aspects of a person's gender and identity might interact to change the way they experience the world and the barriers they might face as a result. Intersecting aspects of identity can include ethnicity, race, age, socio-economic status, religion, sexuality, class or ability. For more information about intersectionality, see page 22.

Understanding intersectional feminism allows us to understand how people experience different forms of marginalisation. It's important to recognise that each individual's experience is unique, meaning there is no singular solution to address gender inequality. Recognising this can allow us to be more targeted in the ways we seek to further gender equality.

How to be a better intersectional feminist:

- Acknowledge your privilege
- Be willing to make and learn from mistakes
- Be open to criticism
- Educate yourself
- Listen and learn from diverse groups
- Use your platform to support others, but do not speak for them.



## Patriarchy

The concept of **patriarchy** describes the structure of society that allows men - especially white, cis-gender and heterosexual men - to exercise power over all other gender identities. Traditionally, patriarchy was thought of as referring to the power relationship between the gender binary, particularly between white men and women. An intersectional understanding of patriarchy is more complex than the binary of men and women, and includes people with diverse gender and sexuality identities. While men have historically been able to wield far greater control and influence over culture and society than women, the effect of the patriarchy on an individual's experiences can also be impacted by oppression and discrimination on the basis of factors like race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender and sexuality, age and ability.

Intersectional feminism reminds us that gender oppression and the experiences of women look and feel different for different women. To look at the patriarchy as being merely a manifestation of male privilege and as the sole driving force of feminist activism, is not enough. Dismantling the patriarchy not only requires addressing male privilege, but also other forms of privilege that allow the patriarchy to thrive.

## Power

**Power** is having control or influence over a person, a group or a system. Power relationships occur within all aspects of society, including within politics, the workplace, within households and between individuals. For an activist and advocate, power can be used as a positive tool to spark social change. This can particularly be seen through social media campaigns, from intersectional feminist influencers and public figures.

## Privilege

**Privilege** is any benefit, opportunity or advantage given to someone merely because of their identity. In Australia, structures of privilege often favour white, cis-gender and heterosexual people. Experiencing privilege does not mean that you will not face challenges - it means that those challenges are not made harder to overcome because of things that are out of your control.

In the mainstream media and public sphere, social justice advocacy and activism is often dominated by activists with privilege - even though the harmful effects of many social justice issues, including sexual violence, disproportionately impact victim-survivors from diverse and minority communities. Activists and advocates must ensure that diverse voices are heard when discussing issues that affect them directly. It is also important that those with lived experience of a particular issue have their experiences reflected in advocacy for social change. This is because those who have experienced harm first-hand have important ideas for how similar harms can be prevented and/or better responded to.



listen

It is important to reflect on your own power and privilege when doing activism and advocacy to ensure you are not 'part of the problem' and that your advocacy and feminism is intersectional and inclusive.



— “

*Sisterhood means that I recognise that my sisters and other gender diverse people's experiences may be different to mine, but I have the responsibility to always listen to those diverse experiences, to learn from them, amplify them, to always find solidarity with them and always acknowledge my privilege wherever I have it, always.*

” —

*Khadija Gbla - Human Rights Activist*

## Activism and Advocacy Groups

### The STOP Campaign

The **STOP Campaign** is a grassroots not-for-profit organisation, mostly comprised of young people aged 18 to 30 around Australia, with a vision to stop sexual violence in tertiary learning communities. The STOP Campaign provides a platform for victim-survivors to share their stories and undertakes education projects like the Safe Response Toolkit. It also facilitates events and programs to raise awareness, encourage peer-led education and foster empowerment. The STOP Campaign membership is open all year-round via their website. Members can participate in the planning and facilitation of programs, engage in sexual violence activism and advocacy activities and connect with individuals and organisations with similar values.

The STOP Campaign's activism is mostly focused on:

- Holding institutions to account in how they prevent and respond to sexual violence in their environments
- Promoting sociocultural change in institutions' internal processes and practices
- Working to bring about broader structural change through engagement in government and community advisory groups
- Creating and sustaining positive sociocultural change through public engagement strategies
- Advocating for victim-survivors through media engagement.

### **ACT Youth Advisory Council (YAC)**

The **ACT Youth Advisory Council (YAC)** is a group of 15 young people aged 12-25 that represents the views and ideas of young people in the ACT by providing advice on youth issues to the relevant ACT Minister. This includes discussing issues that affect young people, like sexual health and sexual violence, along with other needs, concerns and aspirations related to these issues. In 2021, the YAC developed their own consent brochure, which provides clear and easily understandable information on consent and respecting boundaries, including support services in the ACT.

### **Canberra Rape Crisis Centre (CRCC)**

**Canberra Rape Crisis Centre (CRCC)** is a non-government, not-for-profit, feminist organisation working to eliminate sexual violence. On the last Friday of October each year, CRCC organises Canberra's **Reclaim the Night** event to raise awareness of sexual violence and the right to feel safe in public places.

### **Initiatives for Women in Need (IWIn)**

**Initiatives for Women in Need (WiN)** is a volunteer-led organisation established by Dr Madhumita Iyengar in 2013 to support activities to elevate wellbeing of culturally and linguistically diverse women and children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds and families experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence. IWIn has also partnered with international non-government organisations on a grassroots level to support initiatives in India.

### **Forcibly Displaced People Network (FDPN)**

**Forcibly Displaced People Network (FDPN)** is an Australian organisation committed to promoting the rights of forcibly displaced LGBTIQ+ persons through social support networks and policy reform initiatives. FDPN's 'Canberra Statement' published in November 2019 called for multiple reforms to mandatory detention, gender reaffirming health care and support for LGBTIQ+ refugee-led initiatives. Through its LGBTIQ+ Refugee Advisory Group and involvement in the Queer Sisterhood Project, FDPN seeks to empower, support and include forcibly displaced LGBTIQ+ persons around Australia.

### **Meridian**

**Meridian** is a peer-led community-controlled organisation providing primary and allied health and support services that are safe and inclusive to people of diverse genders, sexualities, bodies and relationships. This includes activism and advocacy for LGBTIQ+ communities and HIV for over 35 years and this includes the **Sex Worker Outreach Program (SWOP)**. SWOP is a sex worker-led program that provides outreach to ensure all sex workers are empowered to make informed decisions about safer sex, personal safety practices, laws, regulations and have access to information about their health and rights. They aim to encourage the wider community to recognise sex work as work and ensure that sex workers are treated respectfully in and outside their workplaces.

## Women's Health Matters

**Women's Health Matters** is an independent think tank working to improve the health and wellbeing of women in the ACT and surrounding region. They developed the Canberra Safety Map, which allows women to mark where they feel unsafe to help understand what elements contribute to women feeling safe or unsafe in ACT's public spaces.

## She's A Crowd

**She's A Crowd** is an activist organisation that compiles data about gender-based violence by collecting stories and experiences.

## With You We Can

**With You We Can** is a victim-led charity empowering victim-survivors of sexual assault through knowledge, connection and advocacy. With a hub of resources to demystify the reporting of sexual violence and any process that follows, victim-survivors and their allies are informed and prepared should they choose to formally hold perpetrators to account. Information is uniquely informed by lived experience and written alongside sector experts. With You We Can also advocates for reform in various aspects of the sector in line with best practice.

## #LetHerSpeak / #LetUsSpeak Campaign

The **#LetHerSpeak / #LetUsSpeak Campaign** was created by Nina Funnell in partnership with End Rape On Campus (EROC) Australia, Marque Lawyers and Rape & Sexual Assault Research & Advocacy (RASARA). The campaign aims to abolish sexual assault victim gag-laws where they exist in Australian states and territories. They believe that all sexual assault victim-survivors should have the right to tell their own stories without risk of prosecution to themselves or others. They combine legal advocacy, media advocacy and systems based advocacy to support the victim-survivor community and secure tangible outcomes and policy reform, as well as providing direct legal assistance for affected victim-survivors.

# What Activism and Advocacy Can Look Like

Anyone can get involved with activism and advocacy. You do not need to be part of a wider group or movement, share your identity or sacrifice any part of your identity for a cause. Your style of activism and advocacy can reflect your own personality and be aligned to your desired form of expression.

Activism and advocacy can be done in many different shapes and forms, from joining public marches to expressing your views through art. Below are some reflections from activists and advocates from within the sexual violence space that detail a range of ways to get engaged with the sexual violence movement.

## Reflections of Activists and Advocates

This chapter comes to a close with six reflections of young activists and advocates working to end sexual violence.



## Bianca Nicotra (she/her)

Activist, Victim-Survivor, Deputy Director of the Safe Response Toolkit Subcommittee, former member of The STOP Campaign's leadership team.

“**You are still making a difference by taking the step to educate yourself and educating those around you.**”

For many years, I didn't talk about what happened to me. Although I knew it was never my fault, I couldn't help but feel ashamed – **no one talked about sexual violence** (especially at a Catholic school). I had the overwhelming feeling that I would get in trouble or be blamed for what happened if anyone found out. It was the biggest secret I kept and I was constantly terrified that it would slip.

In 2018, I moved to Canberra and started living in an on-campus residential hall at university. I thought that moving cities would make it easier to forget, but instead I became painfully more aware that the reality of what happened to me couldn't be avoided. **I was uncomfortable with these conversations and ashamed that my instinctual reaction was to end the conversation or change the subject.** It was still too 'inappropriate' to talk about.

Mid-way through 2018, things started to change. Because of The STOP Campaign, phrases like *we believe you, stand with survivors* and *it's not your fault* started being placed around my residential hall. Many people walked by these without a second glance, but it stopped me. For the first time, I felt relief from the weight I was carrying around. No one had said that to me before. No one talked about sexual violence.

This experience started my passion for activism and is why I will never stop advocating for victim-survivors. **It became very clear to me that sexual violence is an epidemic.**

My own feelings of shame and silence over many years were due to a dangerous practice of society 'brushing things under the rug'. Ignoring this issue will mean that it will never disappear, and has extremely hazardous effects on those impacted by sexual violence.

My activism started because of the other like-minded people within my community who made me feel heard and strong. It's how I know activism makes a significant difference and why I have decided that **I will never be silent again** about sexual violence (thank you STOP Campaign).

I want to highlight that advocacy and activism is different for everyone. You don't always have to do BIG THINGS to make a difference. Gender-based violence is fuelled by sexism and misogyny that is unfortunately ingrained in our society.

The biggest support I have received is from other activists, like-minded individuals and organisations. There are some amazing, strong people and organisations already working to make a significant difference and impact.

**I am proud of my part in creating the Safe Response Toolkit – from first noticing gaps in the information available in the ACT, to coming up with this project idea and turning it into what it is today.**

## Amanda Morgan (she/her)

Trauma-informed Survivor Advocate and Activist.



“ **Don't wait for permission, stand in power, be assertive, make a seat.** ”

My activism in this space began in 2018 when I shared part of my story in a Q+A episode to refute the distressing claims made by Bettina Arndt during her 'Fake Rape Crisis Campus Tour'.

My activism is driven by the rights of underrepresented victim-survivors. **My mission is important because the First Nations mob have been fighting against violence since colonisation and we do not receive the same level of recognition as white, cis-gendered and advocates.** Gendered violence is intersectional, and to be truly trauma-informed, we must recognise and platform all forms of oppression and sexual violence in our community.

I founded a campaign called, **Make A Seat**, with the mission to ensure that the intersectionality of gendered violence is platformed. We encourage the media, politicians, event organisers and advocacy groups to wield their power and provide underrepresented victim-survivors with the opportunity to speak up. Our website is designed to eliminate excuses, ignorance and inaction, while also providing a culturally safe resource for victim-survivors to learn and engage with members of the community about how to share stories in an inclusive and trauma-informed manner.

**The purpose of this resource is to empower and embolden victim-survivors to assert their boundaries.**

It urges you to ask yourself:

- Do you recognise your privilege?
- Can you identify unconscious bias, tokenism and racism?
- Are you aware of what cultural safety looks like?

**If we are going to engage, we need to do it much better than it has been done in the past.**

Victim-survivors who are people of colour, people with disabilities and part of the queer community are all underrepresented. We need to hear their stories, recognise how racism, sexism, ableism, transphobia, homophobia, unconscious bias and questions of morality impact our responses to sexual violence advocacy. **It is a community issue as well as an individual issue.**

People are scared that other victim-survivors are not ready. To this, I say: it is not anyone else's right or responsibility to decide when a victim-survivor is ready to share their story. **A survivor is the expert of their own life, and they should be able to determine what justice looks like for them.** We can only provide opportunities for self-reflection in our resources, information about defamation and media training.

Be kind, and always offer victim-survivors and advocates your support first. Don't be a gatekeeper of someone's else's form of justice.



## Carla Bennett (she/her)

Activist and former member of The STOP Campaign's leadership team.

“ ***The Safe Response Toolkit is one step closer to a world which accepts, supports, advocates for and believes victim-survivors.*** ”

My activism in this space took off when I joined The STOP Campaign in 2020. I was incredibly privileged to have had an upbringing free from violence. I didn't truly understand what sexual violence in an everyday context looked like until I lived on campus at university. It was a big wake up call for me to directly experience the lack of open conversations being had surrounding sex and consent, and the negative impacts this was having within the community. I was appalled to learn that sexual violence was occurring at such high rates within learning environments, and how little those in positions of power were doing about it. I learned about The STOP Campaign through a close friend and immediately joined. For me, it was inspiring to see young people making meaningful change through openly addressing issues that are often avoided and overlooked. I knew instantly it was something I wanted to be a part of.

**My activism superpower is my compassion for other people.** It can be really intimidating and at times overwhelming to advocate in the sexual violence space. Through supporting and being kind to others, I hope to ensure the sustainability of our movement and provide a safe and inclusive environment for everyone. Sexual violence doesn't discriminate and neither should we.

My friends are the biggest drivers of my activism. **The Safe Response Toolkit is a resource that I wish we had access to when growing up and navigating new relationships and environments.**

I think I would have been more educated about the resources and different pathways available to victim-survivors of sexual violence, which would have helped me to better access available supports. It is never too late to educate yourself and those around you.

Too often, I have seen men excluded from conversations surrounding sexual violence. There is undoubtedly a negative narrative that portrays men as the sole perpetrators of sexual violence. Taking this standpoint devalues the diverse experiences of sexual violence victim-survivors and deters men from joining in on advocacy initiatives, preventing us from making meaningful change for everyone. In future, **I hope to see the audience for sexual violence advocacy become more intersectional, and particularly see more diverse male representation within this space.**

I would like people reading this resource to know that they are not alone. We stand in solidarity with you. Everyone deserves to live free from sexual violence. Until then, I will continue to advocate for my friends and for those affected by sexual violence to make a lasting impact on the way our community addresses these issues.

I want you to remember that change is coming and that in taking the time to read and share this resource, you have brought us one step closer to creating a safer community for everyone.

## Lydia Jupp (they/them)

Journalist and Advocate with End Rape on Campus Australia and runs an instagram account @Lesbihonestsexed.



“**I’m determined to make sure that the work university student activists do does not go unacknowledged because that’s how power is maintained and institutions win.**”

In Semester Two of 2017, my first year of university, I got involved with my university’s Women’s Collective, just as the *Change the Course Report* was released. I was a gender studies major and had been an outspoken feminist throughout high school, so I connected instantly with people in the Collective. I eventually became an executive member of the Women’s Collective myself and part of my role involved advocating for safer campuses.

I saw universities prioritise money and image over the wellbeing of their students time and time again, even when they knew the harm they were causing. End Rape On Campus Australia supported dozens of other student advocates and me through this time and I wanted to do the same, so I began working with them in an official capacity. **Everyone deserves access to an education free from sexual violence and we’re one of the only Australian organisations working to make this happen.**

University students have been advocating for safer campuses for years. They’ve contributed enormously to the movement against sexual violence but have been completely ignored.

When I was in my university Women’s Collective and receiving a lot of disclosures, the University gave me virtually zero support. We were teenagers and completely unequipped to handle disclosures. I had to rely on the other students working in the same space for resources and support.

It taught me pretty early on that you can’t trust institutions to keep you safe and that fellow advocates are the best source of support possible, two things that are still very much true today. Regular therapy is also vital, as is being your own advocate and knowing what you need to do the work.

There are so many topics and communities that go unacknowledged regarding sexual violence advocacy. People of colour, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, are largely ignored despite facing higher rates of violence, as are queer, trans and disabled people.

**I’m especially sick of hearing the phrase ‘violence against women’ because it completely erases the experiences of gendered violence as a non-binary person.**

I feel as though the higher education sector has been very much ignored, especially over the last year as the conversation around sexual violence has increased.

**Sixty students are being sexually assaulted each day of the semester, but for some reason, that’s not newsworthy.**

**It’s exhausting.**



## Sophie Aboud (she/her)

Activist, Board Director of The STOP Campaign, ACT Young Woman of the Year 2023

“*Listening to and supporting victim-survivors with empathy and care is one positive step. Challenging stigmatising and discriminatory behaviours when we see or hear them is another.*”

I did not understand how pervasive and insidious sexual and gender-based violence was until I moved away for university and began living at college. As a supporter of friends that had been directly impacted by sexual violence at university, I know how valuable the Safe Response Toolkit would have been during those first few years out of high school. I had no idea what support avenues existed for me and my friends, especially as young people in a new city navigating the aftermath of sexual violence and the ensuing stigmatisation and institutional betrayal.

I'm often asked why I advocate for victim-survivors of sexual violence when I haven't experienced sexual assault myself. This question reflects a narrow understanding of the nature and impact of sexual violence, and is a clear example of how we live in a culture that does not support victim-survivors. It should not be strange for people who haven't experienced sexual assault personally to care about preventing it.

The onus should not fall on the shoulders of victim-survivors to change the violent institutions and structures that harmed them. **The onus must be on the people who perpetrated the violence, who work to maintain the structures allowing violence to occur, and who benefit passively from the status quo.** It's our responsibility to listen to victim-survivors, learn from those with lived experience of

violence, and work towards change.

Sexual violence discourse is dominated by white and cisgender women and I'm cognisant of this in my own advocacy. **Listening to and learning from other activists in this space is at the core of my own advocacy, and I am constantly inspired and driven by their tireless efforts.**

Self-reflection and accountability are core elements of advocacy. Without critical self-reflection of our roles in upholding the structures that allow sexual violence to occur, there can never be widespread sociocultural change.

If you are someone who sees sexual violence as a 'woman's issue', have no empathy for victim-survivors unless you imagine your wife or daughter in their place, or feel as though sexual violence does not affect you - I challenge you to examine where those beliefs stem from. They are rooted in misogyny, patriarchy and stigma.

I encourage you to have open and honest conversations with people in your life about sexual violence and stigmatisation. You may be surprised at how many have been impacted. Listen to and support victim-survivors of violence with empathy, and learn to recognise and challenge the drivers of gender-based violence around you. These are achievable and essential steps towards a future without sexual violence.

## Emily Koivisto (she/her)

Advocate, Leader and Chairperson of SHFPACT's (former) Youth Advisory Group.



**“For any survivors reading this, I hear you. None of our stories are the same but they all matter.”**

I am the leader and chairperson of Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT's (SHFPACT) Youth Advisory Group (ended December 2022). Together, we find creative and progressive solutions to promote sexual health literacy in Canberra. I also run my own Instagram account @wannabesexpertemily where I spread my advocacy for the sex positive movement through a feminist lens.

I did not grow up with the best sex education. The education I received was more about implementing abstinence and fear. Consent, relationships, the diversity of bodies or pleasure were never mentioned in my education.

Unfortunately, this meant I had to figure a lot out for myself. My education was so minimal that I did not even realise that I had been sexually assaulted when I was a teenager until I was an adult. If I had been more educated about sex and relationships in my upbringing, these things could have been avoided. My story and many people I know with similar stories are a big part of my drive to advocate for sexual violence prevention and sexual wellbeing promotion.

Growing up with such poor education around sex and relationships created damaging viewpoints about myself and others. I did not know what was normal, safe or healthy. My mission is to break this cycle. The more education and conversations around sex and relationships become normalised, the fewer people will grow up with damaging perceptions around sex and relationships.

By creating a platform to voice these viewpoints, I start a conversation and promote others to do the same.

Being an advocate for promoting sexual wellbeing can also have many challenges. The biggest challenge is deconditioning all the false ideas and misconceptions that have been ingrained into you. Being an advocate for sex positivity requires a deep dive into your past and psychology. How do you advocate for comprehensive sexuality and relationships education when the sex education you received taught you problematic and conservative ideas? How do you promote sex positivity when, as a woman, you were taught that being sexual meant you lost worth? While there is still a long journey ahead of me, having open discussions about these ingrained ideas helps me to look at them at every angle - where they came from, their effect, where else it is seen. By dissecting these ideas, I can overcome them and grow as an activist.

**For any survivors reading this, I hear you. None of our stories are the same but they all matter. I would like to urge people to join in on the movement. Challenge yourself by voicing your opinion and starting conversations. If you are passionate about something and believe in change, do not stop yourself from acting on it. You might just meet some interesting people along the way.**