

## Purple Friday in Bright: How One Small Alpine Town Created a Wave of Purple

*By Jenny Chellew, Public Relations Chair, Rotary Club of Bright*

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From above, it looked like hope. Forty-two people gathered at Bright's clock tower on a Friday morning in late March, all wearing purple, standing together and saying NO to domestic violence. What struck me wasn't the number, but what those purple dots represented: 13 weeks of sustained community action. Five businesses that became 39. Fifteen shirts that became 170.

Bright is a town of 2,600 that swells to thousands during peak tourism. We're known for autumn leaves, not domestic violence. But it's happening here. The Alpine Shire saw 164 reported DV cases the year before our campaign, a 30% increase. Our nearest support services are over an hour away. We couldn't bring services back overnight, but we could show victims they're not alone.

We started in November 2025 with five pubs during Cup Weekend and Hot Rod Weekend, providing up to six free purple shirts to each. Other businesses started asking to join. Within weeks, we committed to 13 consecutive weeks, January through March.

Our recruitment was old-fashioned: walking streets, going door to door, offering free shirts. By January, we had 39 businesses: medical centres, dentists, the bank, cafes, a childcare centre, even the Uniting Church. 170 purple shirts, every Friday.

We ran two social media streams. Friday posts celebrated businesses with warm photos, keeping people engaged. Wednesday posts tackled hard topics: that DV isn't always physical, that emotional control is abuse, that leaving is the most dangerous time. Both were essential.

Six weeks in, businesses reported conversations over counters and while getting haircuts. One shopkeeper spoke with eight people in a single day. Community members who'd been victims thanked us. That's when we knew it was working.

The campaign attracted challenging feedback. Someone commented that controlling behaviour was "what wives are meant to do." We responded publicly: controlling behaviour isn't love, it's abuse. Not every moment was comfortable, but comfort was never the goal.

Running 13 weeks with a small volunteer team is exhausting. We planned a finale hoping for 100 plus people. Forty-two came. At first, I felt disappointed. Then I looked at that drone footage of 42 people in purple on a cold morning. That's not failure. That's community.

Did Purple Friday solve domestic violence in Bright? No. But it changed something. Businesses reported meaningful conversations. We put DV on the agenda in a town that had been silent.

If your club is considering Purple Friday: just do it. Walk the streets. Provide shirts free initially and you will be surprised by how many want to pay for them. Be consistent. Handle pushback with clarity. Remember that no matter how small you are, you can have big impact.

Purple Friday has wrapped, but we're not done. Our goal is to create enough visibility that DV support services return to Bright. That won't happen in 13 weeks, but it starts with weeks like these.

When I look at that drone footage, I see a foundation. I see five businesses that became 39. I see a community saying we might be an hour from services, but we're not an hour from caring.

Purple Friday started with five pubs. It ended with a community that looks different. That's not the end. That's the foundation.