

# Family violence appeal on

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By ARIELLE MONK

GEMMA HAMMOND had been caught in a cycle of domestic violence spanning 15 years before she reached out to Aviva Family Violence Services (Aviva) – and she hasn't looked back. This week, she is speaking out in support of Aviva, ahead of the organisation's annual appeal, which runs over the next two days.

Gemma says she often asked family and friends what they thought a "normal" relationship looked like. However, despite her suspicions, it took her seven years to break away from her most recent ex-partner.

She says she had experienced violence in the past, and when she saw the signs, she knew she finally had to get out.

"I was in the bedroom, sleeping. He came into the room and woke me up – and I saw a look in his eyes that I recognised from previous relationships.

"Although up until that point he had never been physically abusive, Gemma knew violence can accelerate quickly.

"I didn't want my children to see or hear it. I didn't want that lifestyle for my kids. I didn't want them to think that's what a normal relationship looks like."

Gemma has two children to her ex-partner, and at the time she broke away from the relationship, they were 2 and 5.

"For myself, I could tolerate it, but not for my kids. The next day, I made a phone call to Aviva."

Since that call, in June 2012, Gemma says her life has been transformed, with the help of Aviva's staff and services.

Within four days, Aviva's Safe@home had changed her locks at home, secured the windows, and installed a safe room, complete with a barred window and emergency cellphone.

The organisation also guided Gemma through the process of gaining sole custody of her children and a protection



**ABUSE-FREE:** Former domestic violence victim Gemma Hammond.

order, and signed her up to a course on ending domestic violence cycles.

"If I hadn't done that course, I would have got into another violent relationship. I now know my boundaries – it's given me my voice back," Gemma says.

She is now on the waiting list to complete a peer support programme.

Aviva's services cover areas around

Christchurch, Rangiora, Kaiapoi and Rolleston. The proceeds of this year's appeal will go to frontline services such as education programmes, including the one Gemma completed, phone lines, and social workers to provide initial support.

■ Reach Out programme for male abusers, P8.