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Domestic Violence Advocates to Partner with One Love Foundation to Speak to the Dangers of Coercive Control

25 March 2022 — Luke and Ryan Hart, award-winning domestic abuse advocates, authors, and international keynote speakers will take part in a panel discussion on April 12, 2022 at the Bermuda Under Water Exploration Institute (BUEI) on the impact of growing up with coercive control. They will be joined by members of One Love Foundation, a national US non-profit organisation with the mission to end abuse.

The event is part of an ongoing effort by Tammy Richardson-Augustus to bring life-saving relationship health education to Bermuda. Ms Richardson-Augustus, the first Bermudian certified facilitator and ambassador of [One Love Foundation](#) underscored, “Coercive control is a subtle yet dangerous form of abuse that is present in almost all cases of domestic abuse. A singular focus on violence can obscure the reality. Abuse takes many forms, some that do not necessarily involve direct physical assault and some that lead to or are accompanied by physical violence”

In coercive control relationships, perpetrators intimidate victims by threats, humiliation, isolation, degradation, deprivation, or regulating their behaviours. This can include surveillance through stalking, video cameras, reading text messages, monitoring social media, interrogating friends, tracking movements, and frequent accusations of unfaithfulness. Coercively controlling abusers can also make victims 'question their own reality' by thinking they are 'going mad' (known as 'gaslighting').

Katie Hood, CEO of [One Love Foundation](#) reminds us, “We often ignore, diminish or miss the early signs of unhealthy behaviors – possessiveness, isolation, and other methods of control – in the relationships of the people in our lives that lead to these tragedies.”

“We are so incredibly grateful to have the Harts deliver their educational keynote speech” said Ms Richardson-Augustus. “They have delivered inspiring presentations to over 15,000 people in more than 200 speaking engagements across 12 countries (including working with European Commission in Brussels and Stockholm, OECD in Paris, British Armed Forces in Cyprus, UK Police force) and are winners of BBC Inspirations Award 2020. The Hart brothers now want to raise awareness of the complexities of domestic abuse, an issue they say that society too often normalizes or overlooks.

This event is scheduled for 12 April 2022 at 5:30pm – 7:30pm at BUEI. An invitation has been extended to police officers, judicial officers, educators, counsellors, pediatricians, law reform committee members, charities, and community-based organisations. One Love Foundation will give an overview of the topic, the Harts will then deliver their keynote address followed by an open Q&A to drive understanding of the nuances and dynamics of abuse. The structure of the event is intended to foster engagement and tangible next steps.

“We’re honoured to be invited to Bermuda by Ms Richardson-Augustus to share Mum’s and Charlotte’s story.” said the Harts “We’re grateful to have the opportunity to create a positive

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legacy for Mum and Charlotte and to help others with their story. Coercive control is incredibly complex. Even as victims, we didn't understand what was happening to us. This isn't uncommon because coercive control is often designed to disorient, destabilise, and confuse victims, eventually destroying our state of mind and ability to make sense of what was happening to us – referred to a 'perspectiveicide'. While coercive control may at times may seem subtle, its harms are not – we were reduced to hostages in our home, permitted to exist only if we obeyed our father absolutely. Mum and Charlotte were never allowed a life, long before our father took their lives.

The risks and the harms of coercive control are misunderstood at all levels of society, despite coercive control being a better predictor of homicide risk than violence alone. Therefore, we talk about our experiences as often as we can. We hope that sharing Mum's and Charlotte's story will help victims, services, and communities in Bermuda in understanding, identifying, and addressing the trauma and tragic and avoidable loss of life that domestic abuse continues to inflict".

In July 2016, Lance Hart shot dead his wife Claire Hart and 19-year-old daughter Charlotte Hart and then himself within days after the family had left him. Luke and Ryan will talk frankly about life before and after that tragic event and share the red flags which are too often missed or misunderstood.

Ms Richardson-Augustus and her team of Jana Swainson-Roberts and Gemma Godfrey are unwavering to lower the statistics around relationship abuse. Their plan includes:

- Advocating for legislative change to modernize our law and broaden the range of abusive behaviours recognized beyond physical violence.
- Ensuring all judges are appointed and sworn in accordance with the mandatory provisions of the Constitution, adhere to the rule of law and rationally interpret statutes. Lives depend on it.
- Removing the systemic barriers to court access (cost, backlog, evidentiary issues, victim shaming, dearth of victim advocates etc.) which foster an atmosphere of chronic underreporting and attrition. **In the UK, 58% of the abuse cases end with retractions of complaints due to a lack of faith in the judicial process, wanting to move on with their lives and protracted delays. Anecdotal data suggests that the data points are much higher in Bermuda.**
- Instituting special measures (e.g. prohibitions on abusers cross examining victims) in court hearings to mitigate risks posed by perpetrators using the court process to exert further control.
- Calling for an integrated approach among Family Court, Criminal Court and Family Panel. Domestic courts work in silos which may result in survivors having to appear in multiple courts with the attendant expense, time, and trauma.

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- Mandating abuse training for the Bermuda Police Service. The Anna Skeeters murder in Somerset Long Bay at the hands of her philandering husband in 1878 became the catalyst which prompted the Government of the day to establish the Bermuda Police Force in 1879. Given the BPS' association with abuse cases, we want to encourage the BPS to establish trauma informed polices to assess risks, spot escalation and thereby safeguard victims/ survivors of abuse.
- Sharpening our focus on 'paramount best interest' in child access cases involving elements of abuse. The incidents of domestic abuse in children cases is considerably higher than in the general population, with allegations of abuse in samples of UK child arrangement and access cases ranging from 49% - 62% ([gov.uk/domestic-abuse-private-law-children-caes-literature-review](https://www.gov.uk/domestic-abuse-private-law-children-caes-literature-review)). The courts currently adopt a 'pro contact culture' which minimises abuse.

Ms Richardson-Augustus is thrilled with the engagement of local charities including Coalition for Protection of Children, Transitional Community Services, Centre Against Abuse, The Family Centre, Raleigh International, Women's Resource Centre, Warwick Academy, WISTA Bermuda among others who understand that abuse is a root cause issue – by tackling abuse we help to eliminate downstream community problems.

This event will be by invitation only. COVID19 protocols will be observed, as such seating is limited.

About One Love

[One Love Foundation](#) was created in memory of Yeardeley Love, a 22-year-old college student who was murdered in 2010 by her ex-boyfriend. Over the last decade, One Love has transformed the traditional narrative around relationship health and helped young people recognize the early warning signs of abuse as well as how to build healthy relationships, by offering compelling workshops using language and original tools that resonate with young people.