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**toWrite...**  
creative writing  
workshops

## At The Bartholomew Centre

by Louise Alley

It felt so good seeing the trucks come in.

We all got there early, that first day, to be ready for them. Me and Gregor, we both took our boys. Suzanne was there first, she brought a big thermos and shared the tea round. Shame it wasn't bubbles, we all said, but we'll save that for the pouring of the first slab.

Then the earth mover came rolling in and we all cheered and filmed it for the website.

We tried to get our MP along, Herb Henderson. He couldn't make it, but he wrote a real nice message of support and Gregor put it online.

How are the donations coming along, I said to him, what's the update.

He just shrugged. Not so flash. We need a campaign.

He doesn't say much, does Gregor, but he always makes it count.

I heard Suzanne having a chat to my Jamie. He's coming up ten now so he's old enough to understand.

She said to him – "once we open, that'll be when this town realises how much it needs us.

And you need to be on your guard, my friend. There's a lot of lies out there, alright. There'll be a lot of women, feminists mainly, trying to shout you down. You might get taught a few things in school about domestic violence. And a lot of it won't be true. You always need to keep your ears pricked for when they're feeding you stories.

This'll be a safe place for men and their kids.”

I can't wait to see what it's going to look like. It's not going to be the Ritz, that's for sure, not with our budget. Twin rooms, painted white. A huge kitchen so we can all eat together. A games room so the kids can chill out. Enough space for them to do their homework inside and kick a ball outside. I want it to just reek of calm. The sort of place that makes a Dad take a deep breath as soon as he walks in.

I can think of a few blokes we might see in here next year. It's a hard conversation to have alright, especially in a town like this. No one grows up here looking their mates in the eye and asking if they're okay. No one puts a hand on a shoulder and says - it'll be alright. I can help you. At least, not until Gregor and I came along.

We do what we can. We go down the pubs, hang out at the RSL, visit the schools. Schools aren't so happy when we ask them if there are mums out there putting the boot into Dad, let me tell you, but I'm not about to pander to man-haters when I've got more important things to do, like save lives.

And it's bloody difficult for a bloke to admit to. To tell someone he's getting more than the average hard time from the wife. We didn't even know it was possible, growing up.

One every ten days. That's what we know now. One man in this country, dead at the hands of his missus, nearly every week.

We're not professors, not by a long chalk. Not doctors, not social workers even. We just want to do what we can.