

National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges
(NCIWR)

Briefing to Incoming Ministers

1. Overview

Family violence is an insidious and deeply harmful problem faced by New Zealand – and Women’s Refuge, in conjunction with its government agency partners, is essential to the solution. It is our belief that a robust and durable solution requires putting victims’ rights first; collaborative relationships; consistent and sustainable resourcing; investment in pilot programmes, research, and workforce competency; a commitment to advancing gender equality, progressing legislation that protects victims and holds people using abuse accountable; and a whole of government approach. In this Brief, we set out our thoughts around the importance of responding appropriately to the social problem of family violence, the work of Women’s Refuge and its centrality to this, and the issues we regard as crucial to Government’s furthering of this work.

2. Introduction

Family violence is a pervasive and perpetual problem in New Zealand, affecting 1 in 3 women,¹ and accounting for approximately half of New Zealand homicides.² It required 118,910 police call-outs in 2016, which represented a significant upwards trend. Anecdotal information from Police at a national level suggests that family violence constitutes approximately 40% of all Police work. The cost of family violence to the nation has been calculated as between \$4.1 and \$7 billion per annum³ – a corrosive fiscal implication that we believe, given political commitment and sustained attention from government can be significantly lessened. .

Women’s Refuge is a central part of the solution to New Zealand’s problem of family violence – both in the context of providing an immediate crisis and longer term support. In 2016/17, our network of 40 affiliated refuges received 50,645 crisis calls and provided 72,218 nights of secure accommodation within our safe houses, with direct assistance provided to 26,699 women and children. A large and growing percentage of our client base consists of children and young people under the age of 17 years, with 70% of these children under the age of 10 years. Our workforce of some 300 FTEs (supported by a roughly equivalent number of volunteers) accepts referrals from Police, from other social service organisations, and from clients wishing to self-refer. Our focus is on continually finding effective ways to protect and assist women affected by abuse within relationships and preventing this abuse from re-occurring or escalating.

¹ Fanslow, J. L., & Robinson, E. M. (2011). Sticks, stones, or words? Counting the prevalence of different types of intimate partner violence reported by New Zealand women. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 20*, 741–759.

² Family Violence Death Review Committee. (2017). *Fifth Report Data: January 2009 to December 2015*. Wellington: Family Violence Death Review Committee. Retrieved 20 June 2017.

³ Kahui, S., & Snively, S. (2014). *Measuring the Economic Costs of Child Abuse and Intimate Partner Violence to New Zealand*. The Glenn Inquiry: Wellington, New Zealand

Given its national reach, Women's Refuge commonly observes changes and trends over time regarding family violence. In recent years, we have noticed a distinct increase in violence perpetrated by and against young people, including adolescents; an increase in the use of methamphetamine by both clients and their abusers, and the consequent severity of violence perpetrated by abusers using methamphetamine; clients' growing difficulties in accessing housing once they leave our safe houses; and the impact of poverty upon our clients' ability to rebuild and maintain lives free from violence for themselves and their children.

3. What Women's Refuge does

3.1. About Women's Refuge

Women's Refuge has nationwide reach, provides a range of services covering diverse regions, and is New Zealand's leading provider of services to women and children experiencing violence. Our network of 40 member agencies stretches from Kaitiaki in the north to Invercargill in the south. It is a bicultural organisation and is governed as such – its governing group, Te Taumata o Te Kowhai Core Group, consists of two cauci, a Tangata Whenua caucus and a Tauwiwi caucus. This approach has proved effective at working toward the common goal to addressing the causes and impacts of family violence, particularly that perpetrated by one intimate partner against the other.

3.2. Community advocacy and social work (including child advocacy)

Our work in the community focuses on both safety and support. We work with women with a wide range of experiences and goals, and with their children. This typically involves risk and needs assessment, safety planning, assisting people to understand the nature and impacts of family violence, and advocating for clients with other agencies. In most Refuges, this includes work with children, so that they are able to identify what represents safety to them, communicate when they feel unsafe and action basic safety plans when required.

3.3. Safe house services

Sometimes, women and their children are at significant risk of physical violence and need to be accommodated in one of our safe houses. This stay can span from days to months, and women in safe houses work closely with a Women's Refuge advocate to plan for safety and recovery beyond their safe house stays.

3.4. Strengthening Safety programmes and community education

Approximately 50% of affiliated refuges are approved providers of Ministry of Justice Strengthening Safety Services and domestic violence programmes for women and children. These programmes, for adult and child protected persons aim to support the on-going safety of women and children by providing enhanced understanding of family violence and supporting the development of robust long-term strategies to ensure sustainable violence free lives. Because we recognise the Protection Orders are not accessed by all victims and their children these programmes are made available to non-mandated clients on an unfunded

basis. Those refuges who are not contracted by the Ministry of Justice to provide this service also offer equivalent programmes on a non-funded basis. In more recent times, as we move to a more whanau based model, several refuges have begun delivering non-violence programmes for men who use violence. These are currently unfunded. All refuges across the country participate in on-going family violence community awareness raising and education programmes on a regular basis, working with their government partners to increase local knowledge and skills. This work is also unfunded.

3.5. Whanau Protect

Whanau Protect, also known as the National Home Safety Service, has been offered throughout New Zealand to victims of family violence who are at high risk of repeat victimisation and of serious injury or death if they remain in their homes without this service. Whanau Protect involves the installation of monitored safety alarms and home safety upgrades, including replacement of flimsy doors, safety stays for windows and creation of an internal 'safe room' where possible. This service has now achieved national reach and completed 268 safety upgrades in the 2016-17 financial year, providing the levels of security necessary to allow 380 adults and 723 children to safely remain in their own homes. A recent independent evaluation undertaken by the Ministry of Justice has demonstrated the value of this service to vulnerable women and children.

3.5. Transitional housing

In the last year, we have begun providing transitional housing (previously called emergency housing). This enables women who need to leave their partners, or who are struggling to access housing, to stay in one of the transitional housing properties while working with a Women's Refuge advocate to overcome barriers to long-term housing. Transitional housing is also available to Work and Income clients who are not enrolled in our family violence services.

3.6. Pilot programmes and research

There are a number of projects we are currently working on to try to fill the gaps in practice that currently exist in the family violence sector. Our first priority is the 'Kids in the Middle' campaign, which aims to have a dedicated child advocate in every Refuge across New Zealand. At present, children's on-going needs are seldom prioritised in the quest for safety, but we know from research and from experience that their experiences can have long-term impacts on their lives. Accordingly, we are now carrying out research into the needs of children who have experienced living with violence and the role of the child advocate. We are also working collaboratively with Plunket and the Salvation Army on the Community for Change project; a residential service providing longer term wrap around services to younger women and children to equip them with the skills necessary to build and maintain secure lives for themselves and their children. The initial scoping and project planning for this project is now complete and we are ready to move into the implementation phase, pending

identification of appropriate funding partners. Other research interests include the nature and effects of economic abuse, and the relationship between family violence and suicide. Finally, we are currently working with the Police, the Ministry for Vulnerable Children/Oranga Tamariki, and Corrections to improve inter-agency practice for family violence.

4. Building robust partnerships to support victims and promote prevention

4.1. Putting victims' rights first

Victims and their rights should always be at the heart of all legislative and policy decision-making processes. We have seen this evidenced in recently proposed legislative reforms, which have focused on protecting victims' rights to make decisions about contact with the people who have abused them and the safety options available to them, while also streamlining the judicial process and ensuring categories of crime fit victims' experiences. We urge the incoming government to continue to recognise victims' ongoing recovery and autonomy as paramount when considering further legislative change.

4.2. Focusing on collaborative relationships

Over the past several years, and in particular since the disestablishment of the Taskforce on Family Violence in 2015, the family violence sector has found it difficult to find opportunities for meaningful engagement with government. The Taskforce constituted the only mechanism through which we were able to have formal input into or oversight of work programmes on family violence, and its disestablishment signalled a decline of collaborative approaches at all stages of work programmes, from inception to their implementation. Since this disestablishment, analyses of needs, service gaps, and fragmentation or overlaps of services have largely taken place without the voices of non-governmental service providers being included or considered via any formalised mechanism.

Women's Refuge welcomes opportunities for constructive partnership and co-design of strategies and services for the family violence sector. In particular, there is a visible need for a purposeful and reciprocal relationship between Women's Refuge and Government agencies in order to share best practice, and to map out future directions for the sector as a whole. We view this as being best served by a joint working group, established with a view to permanency and focusing on durable and genuine partnership between the government and non-government family violence sectors.

4.3. Ensuring consistent and sustainable resources

Women's Refuge, like many other agencies within the sector, struggles to guarantee continued services to victims at a baseline level, and to strategically plan for improved and targeted services. This is principally due to uncertainty of funding – it is difficult to plan for the

future in light of funding and contractual structures that are not premised on the on-going security of funding. If resourcing could be guaranteed for further time periods and with consideration of building infrastructure for expansion and improvement, strategic planning would be able to be progressed beyond annual increments.

At present, Women's Refuge is not fully funded for the full suite of services we deliver. In fact, in any given year, only 50-60 percent of our funding comes from Government, which puts us in a very precarious financial position that is unlikely to abate without increased funding. This means that services are often operated at a financial loss and we are heavily reliant on other forms of fundraising to meet basic client needs. Resource constraints can, and do, impact upon client services as refuges often find themselves having to prioritise access based on severity of risk and need, thus restricting refuges ability to engage in earlier intervention work.

The struggle to meet existing demand has increased in recent years, while baseline funding levels have remained stagnant. Funding for government agencies, most notably Police and Justice, has increased in recent years in recognition of the increased pressure from family violence service needs and growing costs, but this has not been paralleled by funding for the non-government family violence sector. This is particularly evident in regions where piloted programmes such as the Police-led Integrated Safety Response pilot programmes have resulted in exponential increases in service uptake and referrals, with inadequate and insecure resourcing to those non-government agencies charged with meeting this demand increase for the delivery of front line services. We do not believe this is sustainable and urge the incoming government to review investment in this area.

4.4. Investing in pilot programmes, research, and workforce competency

In addition to ensuring sustainable baseline funding and the opportunity to resource Women's Refuge to strategically plan to meet the needs of current and future clients, we note that one of the key issues facing the sector is a lack of resourcing to underpin realistic pilots, projects, and research that could lead to innovative new practices. Moving ahead requires us to have up to date local research to evidence precisely what is happening across Aotearoa New Zealand, along with identifying and testing new and innovative approaches in both the prevention and intervention space. This is fundamental to the development of best practice responses for everyone working within the family violence sector and we do not believe this task should sit entirely within government agencies. We would ask that government strongly consider the development of robust and genuine research collaborations with the family and sexual violence NGO sector.

Without the opportunities to trial new ways of working and identify the gaps in services and the changing needs of clients, we risk falling behind in our ability to respond and, accordingly, our ability to support women and children when they are subjected to violence is inhibited. We argue that while Government investments into new and innovative ways of responding to

family violence within Police work, statutory child protection work, and the justice system are invaluable, this needs to be paralleled by investment into Women's Refuge and the family violence NGO sector to develop the accompanying social work responses and prevention initiatives. While we are working on a number of such projects, the absence of adequate and/or secure funding for these means they are limited in scope and applicability.

Similarly, our workforce requires investment to increase competency. The professionalisation of any social work workforce is dependent on the organisation's ability to recruit and retain staff by making employment opportunities competitive; which is again dependent on agency resourcing. Attracting professionalised staff is only possible if resourcing makes employment opportunities at agencies such as Women's Refuge competitive – for instance by being able to meet market salaries rates and covering the costs of registration with professional bodies, both of which are currently severely constrained by resource limitations. In addition to this, increased accountability and regulatory compliance requirements imposed by government have required a vastly greater management focus, and the need for skilled and experienced management staff. While we welcome the focus upon ensuring that services are professionally delivered and providing good value for the investment of public funds, recruiting and retaining the management personnel required to ensure we meet the required standard involves a significant investment. We see a role here for Government to take the lead on assisting with these costs. We have welcomed, over the past several months, the introduction of the Family Violence, Sexual Violence, and Violence Within Whanau Workforce Capability Framework, which we hope will be translated into training and function both as a learning tool and a set of measurement indicators for staff competency. As with other areas of training, however, the development of robust, quality, sustainable training practices based on this whole of government framework but specific to our sector is contingent on funding dedicated for this purpose. We strongly believe that professional development should no longer be considered a luxury item when setting budgets.

4.5. Committing to furthering gender equality goals

Family violence, as with other categories of gender-based violence, cannot be separated from the concept of gender equality. Growing international consensus validates the association between indicators of gender inequality and men's violence against women. Accordingly, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) compel State action regarding attainment of gender equality. We would thus like to see Government progress commitments to ensuring pay equity, to attending to the recommendations given by the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and other indicators set out alongside the SDGs.

4.6. Progressing legislation that protects victims and holds people using abuse accountable

Successive governments have made significant progress in ensuring that the New Zealand legislative framework is the best it can be to protect victims and hold people using abuse to

account. Recently, we have seen Bills introduced that have the potential to provide protection to victims in their places of work, to prevent them from being disadvantaged or discriminated against on the basis of their victimisation, to have their abusers prosecuted under legislation more accurately reflecting the realities of their experiences, and to give victims greater power in navigating the judicial system after victimisation. These Bills have been extremely promising. However, there continue to be gaps in the judicial system that preclude consistency of decision-making and impede victims' safety, such as in care of children arrangements and judicial subjectivity in the granting of Protection Orders and sentencing of violent offences. We welcome the chance to collaborate with Government on identifying pathways to identify and remedy these gaps.

4.7. Leadership and a partnership approach

Until recently, there has not been a whole of government approach to combating family violence, but rather piecemeal approaches by the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Justice and Police, with some involvement from the Ministry of Health and ACC. However, while the Ministers of Justice and Social Development co-chaired the Ministerial working group on sexual and family violence of the previous government, there is no single ministry or agency responsible for the family violence sector or for identification of gaps within the sector. Not having this leadership means that the vital work of establishing priorities in conjunction with the specialist family violence sector and working to fill gaps and ensure a baseline competence across the workforce may be neglected. We strongly urge the government to consider creating a semi-autonomous agency or unit within one of the key stakeholder Ministries that would be responsible for development of a national family and sexual violence strategy and general oversight of family and sexual violence across the entire sector.

Alongside the previously noted leadership vacuum, there has been little interest expressed in the notion of genuine government partnering with non-government sector agencies. Rather partnering has been seen as an aspect of government funding, resting almost solely on contracting relationships. It is our belief that any significant progress in reducing levels of domestic and family violence across Aotearoa depends heavily upon adopting a whole of society approach, rather than the whole of government model promoted by the previous government, and by a move away from the current contractual/transactional approach. We would welcome the opportunity to work with government to advance this work.

5. Conclusion

There have been many causes for celebration over the last several years with regard to victims' safety; however, we still face significant barriers. These are chiefly related to resourcing, but also to our role as partners of government agencies as we each (collectively and collaboratively) seek to prevent and address family violence. Equally, though, we can

identify many opportunities for progression, beginning with the development of a partnership and mechanism for participating in decision-making during conversations centred on our core business; that of family violence. We look forward to being part of progressing this work.