



21 February 2012

National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges Briefing to the Incoming Government December 2011

Overview

Domestic and family violence remains one of New Zealand's most serious social problems.

Family violence rates remain unacceptably high in New Zealand. While Police statistics appear to show a levelling out of family violence incidents over the last year, we still lead the OECD in child abuse rates.

Likewise, the Family Court's Chief Judge Boshier noted in November 2011 that Police statistics do not marry with what the worsening trend the Family Court is seeing. Our own statistics over the past year support the position of Judge Boshier.

While politicians and media talk about 'family violence' much of what comes to the police's attention is in actual fact domestic violence. In a Police paper published this year (Communication for Key Stakeholders on Police Process Change) they note:

'...for Police around 70% of family violence occurrences are intimate partner violence with 18% being very serious'

The Paper goes on to note that in around 50% of all family violence incidents they attend, a child or young person is present.

In light of this, we urge the Government to look more closely at intimate partner violence and the link it has with child well being and development.

Introduction

The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges is New Zealand's leading non-government organisation delivering services and support to women and children who have been victims of violence.

We provide a raft of services including:

- 24 hour crisis phone lines.
- 24 hour access to emergency accommodation.
- Home visits and community support
- Education and support groups.
- Information on legal issues, benefits, safety options and housing.
- Policy development, advocacy and Training at a national level

In the 2010/11 financial year:

- Provided over 27,500 different sorts of services to women and children across New Zealand in their homes, communities and within our own safe houses.
- Answered 60,565 phone calls on our crisis lines.
- Provided the equivalent of 83,996 bed nights to women and children for an average stay of 27 days.
- Over half the children who stay with us are under 5 years old
- Employ around 500 staff and 500 volunteers.

2. Organisational Information

The National Collective of Independent Womens Refuges (NCIWR) is made up of 44 affiliated refuges, supported by a National Office and the Core Group¹ (governing body) and one associated member.

The National Office is situated in Wellington, with approximately 5 full-time staff plus 4 permanent part-time positions. National Office services the needs of member Refuges, by administering the National Contract, providing assistance and advice about administration, organisation, training, policy and quality control via service development.

The Fundraising Unit manages the nation-wide Donor Database, Bequest Programme, coordinates the Annual and Christmas Appeals and distributes funding to support local and national Women's Refuge core services and programmes

Other work at the National Office includes:

- Negotiating funding contracts for the Refuges,
- Developing training around family violence,
- Supporting our member Refuges,
- Training government and community organizations on family violence,
- Advocating for the rights of victims/ survivors of family violence,
- Promoting women's and children's rights and non-violence generally,
- Collecting and providing information and research advice on family violence,
- Representing Women's Refuge's views on various interagency committees and working groups and
- Public education via conferences, publications and media.

3. Our Strategic Framework

¹ The Core Group is the governing body of the Collective and has eight members (1 Tangata Whenua and 1 Tauwiwi per region) who are nominated by/representing their region. Core Group are responsible for the 'big picture' – strategic development, planning, adherence to Code of Ethics, and employing the Chief Executive, as well as representing the views and needs of the Refuges in their region

Our vision is to be *Leaders in the prevention and elimination of Family Violence*. Our Values are underpinned by four cornerstones which are parallel development collectivism, feminism and lesbian visibility

The strategic outcomes we work towards are:

- Effective, innovative family violence prevention solutions that incorporate cultural models.
- Championing social change.
- Strengthened capability and capacity of member refuges.
- A recognisable profile for the quality and range of services based on strong relationships with key external stakeholders and leaders.

4. The cost of Family Violence

One of the issues Women's Refuge has been raising over the past year is the enormous costs around domestic and family violence in New Zealand. We believe that there are not only ethical and moral reasons to deal with violence properly but also compelling economic considerations that make underinvestment in the sector unjustifiable.

Interest in estimating the cost of domestic violence emerged in the late 1980s. The driver for such research was the hope that once governments realised the huge costs associated with domestic violence they might be moved to act more. By quantifying the cost of domestic violence, it was hoped that it would become more obvious that it was a problem the whole community owned (and paid for) rather than something that happens to other people behind closed doors.

In 1994, New Zealand economist Suzanne Snively estimated the cost of domestic violence to be between \$1.2 billion and \$5.8 billion per year. We believe that in 2011 the costs will be considerably higher. This research needs to be done again so we can understand the true costs of domestic violence to our society. We contend that when we

In 2004, the British government's Women and Equality Unit had research carried out that estimated the total cost of domestic violence to be £23 billion a year, which included a significant allowance for the emotional and human costs. In the same year, Australia estimated the cost to be around \$8.1 billion per year (Office for Women, 2009).

Many of the costs are obvious - police time, doctor and hospital visits, and crisis responses from agencies such as Women's Refuge and Child, Youth and Family. There are also direct social service costs such as welfare payments and state housing support. The wider criminal justice sector, including courts and prison, also bears considerable costs from domestic violence. They costs are easy to calculate and are generally borne by the government.

However, there are less obvious costs that are often overlooked. We know that employers, for example, also suffer costs such as absenteeism, high staff turnover, and loss of production. There are costs to the wider economy associated with loss of income, loss of tax revenue for the government, and loss of production and consumption.

There are costs to the individual such as the cost of pain and suffering, which we tend to ignore. There is the cost (sometimes lifelong) of injury, illness, trauma and disability that may occur from a violent relationship. A study undertaken by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation in Australia found that 'intimate partner violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44' (2008). Put another way, domestic violence is the leading contributor to preventable disease in Victoria for women aged under 45

There is the cost of decreased quality of life. How do we cost the opportunities a woman loses by staying in a violent relationship such as the loss of a career, loss of family and friends, loss of her hapū or iwi?

There is also the cost of death. Not just the estimated \$4million dollars of police and court time to process (Roper and Thompson 2006) but the emotional costs for the victim's family and friends.

More widely, there are also the issues of poverty, isolation, and exclusion which are all potential outcomes of domestic violence. Domestic violence can both create and compound poverty. We know poverty or money worries can make it harder to leave a violent relationship. But beyond this, leaving a violent relationship and then suffering new (or worsened) economic hardship will also have a significant impact on the survivor's life (and that of her children) going forward.

Women may leave a violent relationship with nothing. They may leave in debt. They may not have savings or a steady track record in employment to fall back on. The nature of domestic violence means some women have never been able to hold down jobs for very long or work at all. In the current climate, jobs are not easy to get – let alone jobs that have flexible hours to meet the needs of sole parents.

Priority Areas for NCIWR

1. Poverty

It is with much enthusiasm we note the intention of this Government (as part of the support package with the Maori Party) to look at the issue of poverty in New Zealand.

Women's Refuge would welcome any involvement in this work.

On a daily basis we see the relationship between domestic and family violence and poverty. Poverty is very much a double-edged sword. On one

hand economic hardship stops women leaving violent relationships. On the other hand, we find time and time again women leaving a violent relationship only to face a life on the bread line – struggling to pay the rent and buy food and clothed for herself and her children.

Addressing poverty will make a difference to the lives of women, children and their families who leave violent relationships.

To address poverty we need to take urgent steps to

- Raise educational attainment,
- Respond to the current adverse economic conditions, including unemployment (which are having an exponential impact on Maori and Pacific communities),
- Have a fair, non punitive, non stigmatising welfare system that assists the people most at need
- Raise the minimum wage,
- Consider a fairer tax system,
- Provide excellent and affordable early childhood care, including kohanga reo,
- Provide high standard and secure state housing for those in need,
- Ensure private rentals are kept to a high standard (monitor dampness, warmth etc),
- Ensure free access to healthcare 2 days a week, 24 hours a day
- Monitor all major indicators of child poverty and report these on a regular basis with specific target reductions to be met on the way,
- Fund child-impact assessments of existing and future national and local policies,
- Given the way poverty impacts on children, we believe the Government should create a senior Cabinet position with responsibility for children,
- Remove work-based rules for child financial assistance and pay the equivalent of the In-Work Tax Credit to all low income families. Simplify the administration of tax credits;
- Provide adequate funding for low decile schools to ensure that all children have access to high quality education.

2. Housing

a) Changes to housing policy

We remain concerned about the decisions made in the housing sector during 2011 that have in effect made it harder for women to leave violent relationships.

From July 1 this year changes to state funding criteria means that a family moving into a state house has only a three year guaranteed tenancy with strict penalties for breaches including changes in numbers of tenants in the dwelling or a significant change in family circumstances such as a new partner or marriage.

It used to be that when a tenant seriously breached their tenancy responsibilities, they could immediately reapply for state housing. In October, this changed and a new 'suspensions policy' means tenants who have had their tenancy ended by HNZ will be declared ineligible for one year.

We know that our clients often take the brunt of problems with Housing New Zealand. Women often hold the tenancy and have debt connected with their name (under duress). Breaches of the tenancy agreement are often the result of their partner's violence (for example withholding the rent, turning up unwanted and making a noise, inviting his friends to stay etc). For example, is it fair for a woman to be evicted because her violent ex-partner turns up and starts threatening her and/or her neighbours?

So while these changes on the face of it may seem reasonable, in families where domestic violence is a factor nothing is very straightforward and we would argue that any breaches need to be dealt with carefully and on a case by case basis.

Every night in New Zealand, 230 women and children spend the night in one of our safe houses. Having a safe, affordable and secure place for these families to live is critical for them to be able to put their lives back together. An important part of this is the knowledge that as victims of domestic violence they can access and maintain state housing tenancies.

Similarly the changes will make it much harder for victims of family violence to access state housing. Escaping a violent situation is no longer as important a consideration as it used to be in the allocation of social housing.

b) Housing conditions

We urge the Government to take immediate action on the condition of many private and state owned rental properties because of the adverse impact they are having on the lives of those who live within them.

New Zealand research carried out by Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith in 2010 found associations between children's housing conditions and their health outcomes, educational achievement, social integration, propensity to be involved in offending or antisocial behaviours and exposure to criminality, violence and victimisation.

Their report also found:

- Children are particularly vulnerable to unsafe or insecure housing conditions because they are in the process of physiological and psychological development.
- Housing issues for children are multi-dimensional and include: dwelling performance; dwelling accessibility and size; affordability, and the

amenities, connectivity and character of the neighbourhood in which a child's dwelling is located.

- Housing problems impact on the ability of families to care for their children.
- Housing problems inhibit others caring for children when parents and families are unable to do so.
- Children's housing needs and the housing conditions that are optimal for children can be different from the immediate housing or other needs of adults.
- Some children are particularly vulnerable to unsafe and insecure housing including disabled children; children in families with very low incomes; children needing care or protection; new settler and refugee children; and children vulnerable to exclusion because of their ethnicity.
- The burden of poor housing falls unevenly. It is more likely to fall on children than adults and it is more likely to fall on: rural children; children in low incomes families; children living in rental dwellings; children from large families; and children living in deprived neighbourhoods.
- Resolution of unmet housing need among children is a platform for optimising their potential, and a first and essential step in resolving a range of issues for children with high and complex needs.

We agree with the findings (page 112): that to address the persistent problems with housing and its impact on the well-being of children we need

- policy and delivery frameworks with children at the centre;
- to improve the stock;
- to address affordability;
- improve the operation of the private rental market;
- expand home ownership;
- improve neighbourhoods; and
- improve housing services, programmes, and delivery

3. Children

Women's Refuge has a long standing interest and commitment to the issue of child well being.

We are of the view that to look after our most vulnerable children, it is fundamental we look after their mother/parents. We can not get to the bottom of why some children are so vulnerable without addressing the intimate partner violence that is so often in their families.

Women's Refuge is participating in the two significant pieces of work going on at the moment around children. A paper has been prepared for the Maori

Affairs Select Committee inquiry looking at the determinants for well-being for Maori children. This work will feed in to the Movement's response to the Government's Green Paper on vulnerable children due early 2012.

As a movement we are deeply concerned about the extent of poverty in New Zealand. Recent reports show that poverty impacts on nearly a quarter of a million New Zealand children.

We were appalled with the findings of the August 2011 Report commissioned by Every Child Counts. This Report highlighted that New Zealand has one of the poorest rates of investment in the first years of our children's lives in the OECD. That results in poor outcomes for our children costing the economy about 3 percent of GDP. The Report also found that New Zealand is one of the poorest performing countries in the OECD in terms of outcomes for children (28th out of 30 countries). It also found that we have one of lowest rates of public investment in children in the OECD (less than half the average public spend per child under the age of 6 years).

Worse still, it seems the investment we do make ranks as one of the least effective. The Report's tentative estimate is that the cost of poor child outcomes in New Zealand is approximately 3 per cent of GDP (around \$6 billion). All this goes to highlight that not only is addressing issues around child wellbeing a moral and ethical priority - it is also an economic imperative.

On November 22 2011, TV3 screened an Inside New Zealand documentary called Inside Child Poverty which looked at last 100 years of child welfare in New Zealand.

The documentary claimed 150 children who died in New Zealand in 2010 would have lived had they been born in Japan, Sweden or the Czech Republic. The vast majority of these children died of wholly preventable health conditions that are caused by poor housing, overcrowding and a lack of primary health care.

It is an indictment on us all that interrelated and preventable social and economic problems are killing our children.

Ongoing Work and Areas of Interest

1. Taskforce for Action on Family Violence

We would like to express our continued support for the Taskforce for Action on Family Violence.

It is the only forum in which decision-makers from the government and non-government sectors, the judiciary and Crown agencies have come together to tackle the problem of family violence. This is international best practice.

The Taskforce has given the sector an opportunity to install a sense of shared leadership and responsibility in the family violence arena. It also presents an

opportunity to co-ordinate the work being rolled out around vulnerable children and the issues of intimate partner violence. We cannot lose this opportunity.

As per our opening comments, we believe the Taskforce should focus more on intimate partner violence which constitutes 70% of family violence incidents attended to by Police. By using the catch all phrase 'family violence' we dilute the individual risks and consequences associated with different forms of violence.

We know IPV can have a devastating impact on children. And we are concerned that the Government's focus on children does not adequately consider issues around what's happening with a child's parents. To really ensure the well being of a child, we need to ensure their parents (or their primary care giver) are well. We will fail children if we look at their situation in isolation of wider family dynamics.

2. The Justice Sector - Legal Aid and the Review of the Family Court

We retain a watching brief on a number of issues impacting on the justice sector.

In April 2011, the Government announced a raft of changes to legal aid following Dame Margaret Bazley's report on the legal aid system, which identified system-wide failings and called for urgent action to rebuild trust and confidence in it. Cost cutting appears to be a significant factor.

We agree that everything must be done to make the legal aid system fair and accessible. We would be very concerned if the new requirements impact on a women's ability to seek safety through the judicial system.

Likewise with the review of the Family Court, Women's Refuge is participating in the current consultation process. For us, the Family Court has a significant role in keeping New Zealander's safe. To work well the Court needs well trained staff, adequate resourcing and for those who use it to believe it is effective. Our input in the review will be based on these tenants.

3. Our Funding Arrangements

NCIWR has met all the contracted volumes for the 2010/2011 financial year.

Indeed we continue to over deliver on our contracted services. Specifically:

- longer term crisis residential or community based advocacy and support was 247 % over contracted delivery
- short term crisis residential or community based advocacy and support was 251% over of contracted delivery
- rural outreach was 255% over of contracted delivery
- child advocacy was 114% over on contracted delivery
- FVIRS was 1235% over of contracted delivery

- crisis line services was 294% over of contracted delivery

In 2011, for the first time, Women's Refuge was subject to cuts from our baseline funding. This funding cut directly impacted on the level of funding each Refuge receives for bed nights. This year our bed nights increased by 12% meaning we are delivering much more for much less. This position is unsustainable and we would welcome a meeting to discuss our funding arrangements and how we can continue to provide safety for women, children and their families in communities across New Zealand.

We are looking forward to working with you towards preventing and eliminating family violence in New Zealand.

We intend to seek a meeting with you in the new-year to discuss how we can collaborate for a safer and happier New Zealand.



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