Kids in the Middle

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National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges

The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR) 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 2019/20, our network of 40 affiliated refuges received 42,510 crisis calls and provided 61,763 nights of secure accommodation within our safehouses, with direct assistance provided to 38,521 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 52% of these children under the age of 10 years.

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Our first and biggest thanks goes to the tamariki who took part, and to their mothers who supported and enabled their participation.

Our next thanks is to The Warehouse, who are a valued partner of Women's Refuge. This research into children's experiences of support after family violence would not have been possible without your commitment both to this project and to Refuge.

We would also like to thank Sheree Ryder for the koha of her kōrero. Sheree generously incorporated her knowledge of Te Ao Māori to support the implications chapter, providing a perspective that would not have otherwise been possible.

Finally, *Kids in the Middle* was made possible by the generosity and willingness of our member Refuges and advocates. Even though protecting participants' privacy means we cannot refer to you by name, you know who you are. Thank you for believing in the project, for extending our invitation to take part to the women and children you work with, and for generously offering your time and resources to ensuring the safety of the participants and their whānau.

Dedication

Kids in the Middle is dedicated to all the amazing kids and Mums who have ever known, and who will ever know Refuge. Specifically, it is dedicated to the 19 incredible children (aged from 5 to 13) who taught us so much, and to their nine awesome Mums who allowed us to speak with their children. To every one of you - thank you! We am using your 'assistant researcher' names in this report just like we talked about.

We talked to you because we really wanted to know what it is like for young people to come into Refuge for the first time. It has been a long, long time since we were kids, so we really needed you to tell us. We were keen to hear how it felt, what you remembered most, and what ideas you had to make it better.

You offered your thoughts and insights, and that enabled this whole project to happen. By telling your stories, you gave us a great gift. We listened to your helpful and brave suggestions, your insistence on improvements, and your expert voices. You spoke heaps about your journeys with us at Women's Refuge. That is why this report begins with your voice. Without you, this report could not exist - you are the essential ingredient.

Our gratitude for your koha, time, energy, laughter, silliness, and seriousness is reflected in how we set out this report. We start by explaining how we got to interview such amazing kids, and we explain how you told us you wanted to take part. Next, we look at what happened in our interviews. We jump right into what you told us because that is the most interesting part. After that, we talk about how we listened to you, and how we thought about your stories. You will see that at the start of every chapter, we have written a bit just for you.

We tried to keep your words pure and do justice to them. You can tell us if we have got any of it wrong! We decided to write about your stories first and keep all of the other research bits to the very end. If adults are looking for the literature overview and methods (kids, these are the long wordy research bits!) they can find them as appendices (Appendix A, Appendix B).

Kauri (8), you clearly showed us you are best placed to assist us with our mission to make our services better for you.

Interviewer	*Do you know how Refuge helped Mum?*
Kauri	**No.**
Interviewer	*That's okay, no worries.*
Kauri	**But I know how Refuge helped me.**

Charlotte (9), we know that you were able to freely tell us what you thought, and your quote is a great way to show that. It sets the scene, showing your selflessness and care for others who have had similar experiences to you. It shows your unabashed dedication to the process and your determination to highlight the gaps so we can be better!

| Interviewer | *Is there anything about this place [Refuge], like if you had a million dollars, that you would want to change?* |
| **Charlotte** | **I would give it all to Women's Refuge so that they could help people who needed things and they could buy them and help them make this place better. I'm not saying that it's bad, I'm saying it is really good, they could make it better. There is always room for improvement.** |

Finally, Ihaka (9), your advice for other children is perfect. We could never say it better. Every word you spoke was a gift, so thank you.

"Be good, be safe, care for each other, be good"

"Be the best kid you can be!"

Executive Summary

Hearing tamariki speak about their experiences with Women's Refuge has enabled us to genuinely view children as an individually deserving client group with an equivalent, but specific set of needs. *Kids in the Middle* analysed how support is currently offered to tamariki and identified what integrated support must look like for tamariki who access our services in the future. Many of the preconceived ideas that were held about effective practice with children were transmuted as children exposed what true partnership looks like and feels like to them. Tamariki imparted their expert knowledge and provided the opportunity for adults to gain a real understanding of what children require and what support they value as they navigate their journeys in the aftermath of violence.

Consent

Foregrounding the findings is our attention to the dynamic practise of consent with children. For their participation to be meaningful to them, rather than solely to us, we needed to carefully construct the foundations from which children could build and assert their confidence, preference, and voice. Using the temporal separation of 'before', 'during', and 'after' children's participation, the 'consent' chapter explains our approach to positioning children as our partners and advisors in this research. Children then affirmed this approach by exhibiting their fluid enactment of consent and demonstrating how their autonomy and confidence was supported by the research design and the relational setting of their interviews.

Before

Before children arrive at Refuge for the first time, they are impacted by the violence perpetrated in their households and by the upheaval precipitating their contact with Refuge. The children described physical and emotional abuse directed toward their mothers and themselves, and referred to tactics of coercion used by perpetrating parents that made them feel confused and helpless. In contrast, children's recollections of family functioning portrayed their mothers as safe, protective, and attentive, and as employing a range of strategies to ensure their children's wellbeing, and to resist the perpetrator's violence and its impacts. Although each participant's backdrop of violence was uniquely experienced by them, their narratives shared common facets and were associated with significant commonalities of emotional response. These emotional responses represent an important aspect of their introductions to Refuge, and the ways they

perceive and build safety for themselves. In every participant's account, the contexts leading up to their initial contact with Refuge clearly influenced their needs for and perceptions of support.

During their interviews, children showed us how articulate they were when considering and expressing emotion, their vulnerability when sharing challenges and difficulties, and how they enacted their resilience when faced with daunting new prospects. These children have now benefited from child-targeted support that strengthened their self-awareness and emotional literacy. However, their characterisation of hypothetical other children and their recollections of their own entry and introduction to Refuge also offer critical insight into the preconditions that must be met for children to identify and express their emotional experiences. These emotional experiences are expressed differently than their mothers, but are equivalent in depth, significance, and uniqueness.

Accordingly, child clients are far from passive passengers in their mothers' journeys. Rather, their recollections of first accessing Refuge suggest that, if equipped with child-focused roadmaps, children are capable of proficiently navigating their own unique experiences. Throughout their stories of 'before', children offered insights that highlight how Refuges may lend greater power to children arriving at the temporary destination of Refuge in the future.

During

In the 'during chapter', we highlight how children's articulation of thoughts and feelings may be regarded as subalternate to adults' experiences if we are insufficiently attuned to *how* children communicate personal experience and feeling. Honouring both the way children express themselves and how children understand their positioning just prior to their initial Refuge contact offers dual benefits. First, it generates greater potential to identify the specific needs of children, and therefore more tailored support for them. Second, that understanding may have direct and ongoing transferability into feedback loops that contribute to the continuous improvement for those services in the future.

Children clearly explained what brought them comfort and a sense of belonging, and how these form the basis for coping and therefore offered them a sense of safety. Embedded in the infrastructure of their everyday lives, children's coping also signalled greater potential for purposeful fostering of children's negotiation of safety than what could be practicable within a ten-week children's programme. In contrast to an individualist, skills-based approach, the intentional design of a service responsive to the needs of children represents the scope to strengthen

children's structures of safety, including those that will remain with children after they exit Refuge. In sum, continuity of support for children corresponds to continuity of children's coping.

After

Children experienced Refuge with and alongside other children, and benefited from these reciprocally supportive friendships. They identified significant gains that Refuge had offered them, and demonstrated their pride in their learning and their connection with others. However, just as their transitions 'to' Refuge represented upheaval and anxiety about the future, so too did their transitions 'from' Refuge. Their exits and endings were marked by intensely felt grief and sadness at the loss of their friendships and their roles at Refuge, by their continued worry about their own and their family's futures, and by apprehension about the sustainability of the safety they had experienced while at Refuge. Their worries were in part associated with limitations in how whānau were brought into the work with children, such as the minimal facilitated involvement of their mothers in their learning, and the under-explored characterisations of their perpetrating parents.

The children each underlined the values that needed to underpin a service that is just for them, including the tailoring of support that can be sustained beyond their immediate involvement with Refuge, the continuous commitment to inviting, hearing, and utilising children's feedback into what works for them, and a focus on the transferability of skills, safety, and learning beyond the Refuge context.
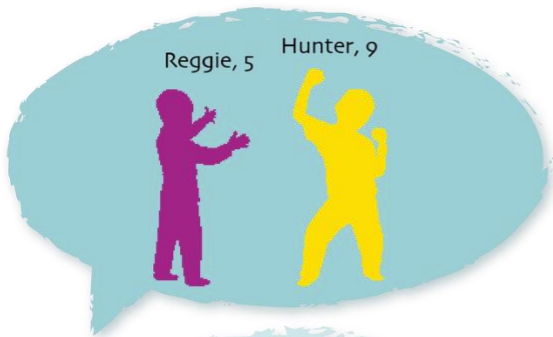
Importantly, children felt that sustainable support must involve the capacity for their connections with (and opportunities to contribute to) other children to be maintained after their safe house stay or programme participation ends. Finally, through their representations of the key characters in their 'after' stories, they emphasised why support for children must be both family violence-informed and child-centred.
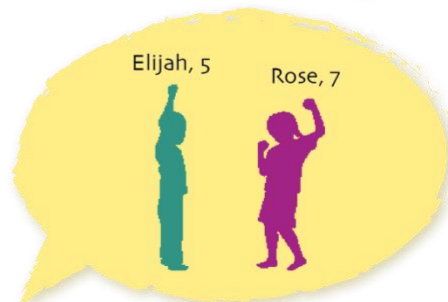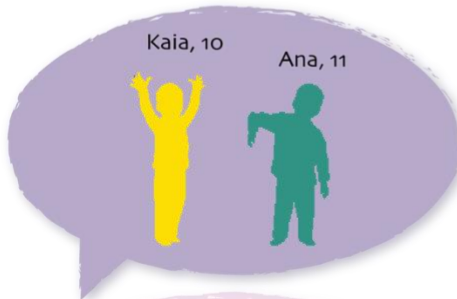
Continuity

In the 'continuity' chapter, which concludes the research findings, nine-year-old Charlotte's proposal is used to demonstrate children's capacity to express views and give input, and to emphasise the shift in focus from equipping *children* with the right skills to 'cope' to equipping *adults* with the right skills to support children's coping. We use this proposal both in its entirety and with our interpretation added to demonstrate what children feel is integral to support that is designed for them.

Eight-year-old Kauri showcases how influential positive Refuge experiences can be for children long-term. The kindness that he saw, found his own truth in, and then practised in contexts beyond Refuge is testament to the potential for children to grow, thrive, and contribute to others when they feel confident, comfortable, and safe. Both children's powerful stories show that above all, support designed *for* children must be predicated on how we hear them and think about them – before, during, and after their time at Refuge.

Meet the kids

Reggie, 5   Hunter, 9

Kahurangi, 10   Tai, 8

Ihaka, 9   Kauri, 8

Leila, 13   Isla, 12   Evan, 7

Charlotte, 9

Kids in the Middle

Kaia, 10   Ana, 11

Awhina, 10   Aaria, 7

Emma, 6   Jax, 7   Ambrose, 8

Elijah, 5   Rose, 7

Preface

While *Kids in the Middle* is about children, ultimately it is *for* us, Women's Refuge. The more we understand about children's experiences, the more we can strengthen the ways we support them. However, our design of the *Kids in the Middle* data collection and analysis process was explicitly *for* children, not just about them. As Women's Refuge's policies reflect, children are taonga; they deserve every protection, every opportunity, and every form of support and care that we can offer.

Kids in the Middle aimed to explore how children understood their involvement with Refuge, how they demonstrate 'coping' while they access our services, which aspects of the support that they access are meaningful or useful to them, and how they feel this could be improved. However, the scope of what they gave us through their participation transcended these aims to build a comprehensive story of the entirety of their experiences at and beyond Refuge.

Their narratives offered insight into children's experiences that surpassed our every expectation, and these are represented in the five findings chapters that commence this report. As the unconventional placement of these findings suggests, the structure of *Kids in the Middle* differs from that of a typical research report. Like we emphasised in our dedication to the children, this report begins with the most important part: children's stories.

Elevating the voices of children and maintaining children's safety were (and are) our overarching priorities. How we conceptualised children's roles and our roles in this research were foremost informed by these; children took up positions of *Kids in the Middle* 'expert advisors'. We hope the way we set out this report does justice to their expert input.

Interviewer	*If we wanted to work more with children what would we call a place like this?*
Charlotte	**'People Refuge'.**
Interviewer	*'People Refuge'?*
Charlotte	**Because we are all people.**
Interviewer	*Who is invited to 'People Refuge'?*
Charlotte	**Everyone, no aliens.**
Interviewer	*No aliens allowed?*
Charlotte	**Or lizard people or chicken people.**
Interviewer	*No lizard people for sure!*

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Findings

The findings are organised in keeping with children's own focus on continuity. Their narratives encompassed each of the temporal phases of children's involvement with Women's Refuge, and extended from 'before' their entry to the service right through to 'after' the completion of their involvement. However, two meta-themes that emerged from children's narratives traversed each phase. The first relates to the enactment of consent in children's participation. The second relates to children's perceptions of (and need for) continuity across and beyond each temporal phase. We considered 'consent' as foregrounding children's safe engagement, and 'continuity' as influencing how children retrospectively considered the support they were offered. Accordingly, we use these two meta-themes to bracket the 'before', 'during', and 'after' phases in the structure of the findings. Given that these both focus on *how* children participated in *Kids in the Middle*, these chapters ('*Consent*' and '*Continuity*') are written reflectively to give emphasis to the tone of children's participation, in contrast to the analytical structure of the other findings chapters.

Findings are thus organised as follows. Chapter one: *'Consent',* sets the scene by introducing how consent was practised and demonstrated by children in the interview context, and illustrating the 'before, 'during' and 'after' phases of children's participation. Chapter two: *'Before'*, offers an overview of children's thoughts, feelings, and expectations as they arrived at Refuge. Chapter three: '*During*' looks at the themes in children's stories of taking part in Refuge services. Chapter four: '*After*', then sets out children's recollections of completing and ending their time in safehouses or programmes. Finally, Chapter five: '*Continuity*', showcases how children's involvement and participation is complex, competent and continuous, and extends beyond the temporal boundaries of services.

Just as the sequence of findings chapters is based on the temporal aspect of narrative, so too is the structure of each chapter. Chapter one, '*Consent*', is organised temporally, to introduce the way that a focus on children's consent spanned the 'before, 'during', and 'after' of their participation. The '*Before*', '*During*', and '*After*' chapters (chapters two to four) are then each structured according to key narrative components; namely, 'setting' and 'character'. These chapters therefore begin with 'setting', followed by 'self', and finally by 'other'. The final chapter, '*Continuity*', then weaves these narrative components together.

Kids in the Middle involved two researchers. The first interviewed the children in their sibling groups, and the recordings of these interviews were then watched by both researchers to begin the analysis of their stories. Accordingly, 'we' is used throughout to denote both researchers; 'I' is used when the interviewer is recounting her experience of interviewing the children. The full interview process is detailed in our explanation of our method, appended to this report.

Chapter One: Considering consent

Kia ora kids! Thanks for working so hard on this research and showing us that you were excited to share your ideas and opinions. It was important for us that you knew how you could say 'no' if you did not want to do an interview or an activity. We saw that you were keen to help out and keen to have lots of fun. Remember the consent book and the 'stop sign'?

In this part, we explain to the adults reading the big report how we knew you wanted to take part. We are letting them know about how quickly you learnt and practiced new ideas. They can read about how you were able to be assertive about your wishes and concerns at the start, middle and end of our time together – 'you got the power!'.

CONSENT – OVERVIEW

Children are simultaneously the *Kids in the Middle* subjects and the primary resource that enabled its completion. Without their meaningful participation, we could not have captured their voice or their stories. At the same time, their protection and safety (in all of its forms) was paramount. We could not proceed until we were satisfied that we had prepared for anticipatable risks and arrived at a research design premised on meaningful consent and beneficial engagement. A full overview of these methodological decisions is appended to this report. However, as signalled at the outset of this report, the concept and various enactments of meaningful consent were significant both to the data collection process and to many aspects of the findings. As such, we have used these as the basis for this dedicated findings chapter, which then orients the remainder of the findings chapters.

This first finding chapter introduces the temporal organisation of 'before', 'during', and 'after' that is used to separate the subsequent findings chapters. Here, these correspond to the 'before', 'during', and 'after' of children's interviews, rather than their engagement with Refuge more generally. Much of this chapter is written in the first person, to give effect to the interviewer role in promoting children's comfort and expression.

Consent was integrated throughout each of these. This chapter begins by demonstrating how consent was treated as a fluid concept, understood by both the interviewer and the children as ongoing and relationally bound, and how children exercised autonomy over the boundaries of consent. Finally, it sets out the reflexive ways that children practiced consent, including their demonstrations of how they might withdraw or put conditions on this consent, and their use of tools to negotiate consent within and beyond the interview setting.

CONSENT – BEFORE

As the appended overview of our method explains, we used a 12-step process involving multiple gatekeepers in order to invite children's initial consent. The children, who were interviewed in their family groups twice, could give as much or as little information as they wanted to and felt comfortable with. They were the sole decision-makers for whether they had a second interview, and each child chose to have a second, with many expressing a desire for a third. Children's mothers played a vital role in the consent process, with Kaia and Ana's Mum stating "I feel privileged [that] my kids can participate". Children were asked if they wanted Mum present or not, and most were happy for Mum to stay. Charlotte's Mum demonstrated her consideration of Charlotte's right to consent by asking her "do you want me to go into a different room?" while Ambrose, Jax, and Emma's Mum offered them the choice but suggested that "they will probably speak more freely if I'm not here".

To introduce and reinforce consent before each interview, separate child-specific, developmentally accessible visual tools were given to children to facilitate their understanding and questioning about consent. These helped to address the power differential inherent in the interviews through the sharing of symbolic power to stop, start, or change the interview. The first tool (Appendix C) is a booklet used to support the explanation of confidentiality and its limits. The second (Appendix D) is a consent booklet depicting children in an interview setting talking to a researcher and creating art. The booklets assisted the interviewer's discussions with children, which involved giving children examples of different consent-related decisions. The third tool (Appendix E) is a 'stop sign'. The interviewer emphasised to children that this sign meant they could hold it up for any (or no) reason, and that if they did, the interview would immediately stop.

Setting up children's expectations of the process also involved their mothers. Many of the children had been well prepared by their Mums about the research purpose and were very excited to share their stories. When asked about their understanding of the research they stated that they wanted to *"help other kids"* (Hunter, 9) and *"I want to help all the people because I want to help people learn better."* (Charlotte, 9). Many kids alluded to wanting to give back and support Refuge. The researcher was careful to set expectations of the value of participating, ensuring that children understood the limits to the transferability of their stories into immediate and actualised change. Researching with integrity meant cautioning children that their recommendations would not automatically or necessarily be actioned. Instead, explanations focused on the collection of their ideas and opinions towards the future and hoped for development of Refuge services. This

simultaneously avoided the potential for their participation to be taken for granted, whilst protecting their willingness to participate. This reiterated that children's consent be given free from the believed research outputs and perceived benefits of participation.

Charlotte (9) understood that she was there to share stories about her experiences with Refuge. She discussed that she was interested in taking part because she *"liked helping researchers"*. This comment prompted the idea that all the children could participate as 'assistant researchers' as the creation of stories occurring within the interview space was the most valuable aspect of the process. This title acknowledged the co-creation of knowledge and helped demonstrate to the children the importance of their voice and their immense influence over the research. Charlotte received a special 'assistant researcher certificate' as an added thank you for the proposal she created for Women's Refuge consisting of *"four pages of writing"* (see Chapter Five: '*Continuity*' for Charlotte's full proposal).

Tools that act as visual aids for concepts helped to embed an understanding of consent with children. The consent booklet, for instance, was primarily created as a child appropriate tool to encourage discussion and explain consent to children. It was also useful when accounting for the differences in age and subsequent comprehension within family groups. Below we see that Evan's (7) sister Leila (13) has a more sophisticated understanding of consent, but that having a physical booklet piqued Evan's curiosity.

> Interviewer   *Do you all know what consent means?*
> **Leila**   **Permission.**
> Interviewer   *Permission yeah exactly.*
> **Evan**   **But it says 'consent' [looking at the booklet in my hand]**
> Interviewer   *Yeah absolutely this is a little booklet I've made for Evan to understand a bit more about consent because it might be quite hard.*

Rose (7) was shown the consent booklet with stick figure drawings representing her as a participant. She seemed to feel a disconnect between the figures and herself, but immediately named her concerns.

Rose	***I don't really like having no hair. I don't want to be sick because I don't want to be bald[...]I don't want to look like that guy.***
Interviewer	*Shall we draw some hair on and you can choose.*
Rose	***And [the stick figure has] no top.***
Interviewer	*That's right maybe we should also put some pants on.*

Rose chose to draw hair on the stick figure so it more closely resembled how she perceived herself. In doing so she places herself in the booklet and is better equipped to comprehend consent. Rose evidences her comprehension of the booklet, stating that "this is me…and I said yes". I emphasised that she did not have to say 'yes' and that she had many options. Rose responded by practicing saying "yes, no, maybe, sure". This interaction facilitated Rose's growing confidence that she did not need to 'appease' the researcher by saying 'yes', that other answers would be welcomed and taken as seriously, and that there would be no negative repercussions for alternative answers. Similarly, Kahurangi (10), who valued respect, is perturbed by the prospect of refusing consent. She expressed concern about using words that may be construed as disrespectful, which I felt may be a way for her to 'test' how I responded to her perceived 'niceness'. To counteract this concern, I suggested ways to say 'no' that Kahurangi might consider are acceptably polite.

Interviewer	*So you could say 'yes you can show my picture' or 'no you can't show my picture'.*
Kahurangi	***That is a rude one. I don't want to say it. I will say thank you, please, you're welcome.***
Interviewer	*Or you can say 'no thanks!' or something like that.*

When consent was again discussed before Kahurangi and her brother Tai's (8) second interview, this message seemed well embedded. Both Kahurangi and Tai were able to maintain their respectful communication while being assertive and direct in their practice responses.

Interviewer	*So I have come in here as an adult and I say 'draw a picture' and you might feel you have to draw a picture okay, but if you don't want to, what can you say?*
Kahurangi	***No thank you.***
Tai	***No thank you.***
Kahurangi	***Yes, no, no thank you, yes please, thank you but no.***

Modelling and practicing a range of consent responses shifted children from their often default answer of 'yes', and assured them that any response they gave would equally 'please' the

researcher. Discussing responses that may be contingent on children's conditions reinforced the acceptability of all possible answers, and gave children the authority to assert their answers without concern for repercussions. They quickly learnt that any time consent was declined, it was celebrated as a brave assertion of their wishes.

Stop signs were introduced as a tool at the outset of children's interviews, so that if they wanted to stop or pause any aspect of their interviews (including dialogue, questioning, or drawing) they could do so without the onus of verbal retraction of consent. A stop sign was given to each child, and to their Mums if present. I explained that if children wanted to stop at any time, they could either say 'stop', or hold up, point to, or tap the sign as if pressing the 'stop' button. This would be followed by the immediate cessation of all activity and conversation. I practised this with them before proceeding to any interview questions. Throughout the interviews, children utilised their stop signs to express their wish to decline consent. These were used when children did not want to answer a question, if a question was framed in a difficult way, if they were unsure about drawing or did not want to draw, if they wanted a break, if they did not want to discuss a particular topic, or if they had finished answering a question or drawing a picture. This range of reasons for their use demonstrates children's ability to comprehend and apply the concept of consent as ongoing and enacted both individually and relationally.

When Ambrose (8), Jax (7), and Emma (6) were introduced to the 'stop' sign, they named its function immediately. I purposefully incorporated 'having fun' with the introduction of this consent tool by making and encouraging jokes and joining in with their laughter. This was to further signal to children from the outset that if they needed me to 'stop', I would prioritise their comfort and stop immediately.

Interviewer	*What do you think this is for [holds up stop sign]?*
Ambrose	**Stop sign!**
Interviewer	*Yeah it's a stop sign, what is it for today?*
Jax	**Stop people.**
Interviewer	*Stop people.*
Emma	**Stop people from talking.**
Interviewer	*Stop me from talking?! [all laugh]*

Ihaka's (9) and Kauri's (8) conversation is an example of their understanding of consent and consent tools, and the applicability of these to their individual situations. They displayed a sophisticated comprehension of consent that encompassed the power dynamic within the interview, using the tools to facilitate the transfer of 'expert status' from me to themselves. They

took ownership over their interview by constructing and upholding their own boundaries, which in turn are acknowledged and followed.

Interviewer	*What if I ask you to draw a picture and then I say 'can I take a photo of your picture and show it to other people?' what can you say?*
Kauri	**Maybe, who you are going to show it?**
Interviewer	*Totally yeah.*
Kauri	**[I could say] Who you are going to show it to, like my dad or something?**
Ihaka	**[I could say] Are you going to put it on any social media?**
Interviewer	*So you can ask more questions about it, and it is your choice, whatever you want me to do. So, if you say don't show it to this person, I will never show it to that person.*
Interviewer	*So if I say, 'can I take a photo of your picture?' What else can you say?*
Ihaka	**Yes.**
Kauri	**Maybe, for sure, no.**
Interviewer	*Yeah definitely and so that is called consent and consent means you have got the option you can say yeah, no...*
Ihaka	**...maybe...**
Kauri	**[Singing] ...you got the power!**
Interviewer	*That's it mate, you've got the power.*
Kauri	**I have got the power to like tell you who to show it to and who to not.**
Interviewer	*That is exactly right you couldn't have got it better; you could not have figured it out more. So, whatever you tell me all I am going to say is 'that's great! Thank you for telling me what you want'.*
Interviewer	*So you both got the power! What else gives you the power?*
Ihaka	**Stop sign?**
Interviewer	*Yeah, and how does the 'stop' sign give you the power?*
Kauri	**Like if you are answering a question and you don't want to answer you can pull it out.**
Ihaka	**Or do this [puts the sign on the table].**
Interviewer	*Then what happens if you do that or if you hold it up what is going to happen?*
Kauri	**You'll stop talking.**
Interviewer	*I'll zip it [zips mouth].*

CONSENT – DURING

If children had not yet used their stop signs in the interview, they were reminded about them as a way of encouraging their use and reiterating their availability to enact consent within the interviews. Prompts to consider their 'stop' signs were threaded throughout the interview. I often prefaced questions or statements encouraging children to consider their stop signs whilst reminding children of their rights. *"I was going to get you to draw a picture but remember you don't have to. Just remember when I tell you what it is you can say yes or no to it".* In addition, I routinely checked for continued comprehension of consent, as shown in an interaction with Charlotte (9).

Interviewer	*So first up, do you remember what these things are for [holds up stop sign]?*
Charlotte	**When you don't like a question you can just hold it up and just say no.**
Interviewer	*And what will happen as soon as you hold it up?*
Charlotte	**We'll stop and do something else.**

Children were frequently able to use their 'stop' signs without being prompted. In the following example, Hunter (9) made sure that his 'stop' sign was within reach, illustrating both his understanding of the stop signs utility and his preparedness to use it. During the second visit to Hunter's house, we required more space for Hunter to draw his 'dream Refuge' so had moved from one side of the lounge to the other. Hunter had left his sign on the opposite side of the room. Although he had not felt the need to use it until that point, Hunter was still aware of its proximity.

Interviewer	*Thank you so much [for drawing your 'dream Refuge']. Can I ask you just one more question?*
Hunter	**Sure! Wait, I will go and grab the stop [sign] just in case.**

Similarly, Aaria demonstrated her willingness to use the stop sign when she needed a break from the interview. She was assertive in the communication of her needs. This was met with purposeful validation of her choice to extricate herself from the situation, affirming that the context she has used the sign in immediately yields the promised result.

Aaria	***Stop! (holds up sign).***
Interviewer	*Stop, you've had enough? yeah okay, good work.*
Aaria	***I need a break.***
Interviewer	*Good idea what are you going to do on your break?*
Aaria	***Have a drink.***
Interviewer	*Good idea, you are awesome at doing that stop sign, you are so good at it.*

The individuality of how consent tools were introduced and practised was also important to shaping the feel of children's interviews, as evidenced in my reflection note below.

I observed ongoing consent being demonstrated in many ways that were less prescribed. I spent a lot of time building relationships with the children individually. This involved spending time getting to know what they enjoyed doing, asking about their favourite things, checking out how school was going, helping them with maths homework, listening to their te reo practice, planning fun activities and riddles to do together, checking in about their busy weeks, having dinner with them and their whānau, and asking Mums about their kid's hobbies and interests. This emphasis on relationships helped to ensure the interviews were fun for all involved and allowed a deeper understanding of children's comfort whilst participating. There was much hysterical, shrieking laughter, lots of silliness, many sporadic bursts of song, and dance routines to practice and perfect. They showed that they wanted to be there and be involved. The vast amount of detail they put into their pictures, and into the information and ideas they shared indicated the process was consensual. On a few occasions when the kids knew I was due to arrive at their house, they came screaming out to the car to show me their pencil cases, the drawings they had done, to tell me about school, and help carry some things in from the car. I enjoyed visiting them and we all understood that their consent to participate was bound by our relationships. The kids were engaged and comfortable with the interviews being recorded, and much time was spent pulling faces, or trying to 'escape' the green facial recognition square on the camera. In their second interviews some remembered how the Dictaphone worked and turned it on themselves to start the recording.

The constant attention to consent positioned children as willing to give feedback and assert their preferences. Charlotte (9) exuded confidence as she gave feedback and constructive criticism. She was forthcoming in her acknowledgement of both her contentment with Refuge services and the potential progress Refuge can make.

> *Interviewer*   *Is there anything about this place [Refuge] like if you had a million dollars that you would want to change?*
>
> ***Charlotte***   ***I would give it all to Women's Refuge so that they could help people who needed things and they could buy them and help them make this place better. I'm not saying that it's bad, I'm saying it is really good they could make it better. There is always room for improvement.***

In addition, Charlotte evidenced her knowledge of consent in how she answered questions. With a particularly tricky question, she thought for a long time before calmly replying "get back to me on that one". When I checked with Charlotte, she explained that although she had no immediate answer, she still wanted time to think it over.

Elijah (5) and Kauri (8) both showed their ability to autonomously guide the direction of their consent. Elijah was asked if he wanted to share one of his goals with me, to which he firmly responded "no", once again his choice was affirmed as a great way to express his preference and consent. Kauri (8) decides to check his comprehension of the drawing I asked him to create before he consents. In doing so he reflects on the expectations of his participation.

> ***Kauri***   ***So first [the drawing] is what we have been doing inside of Refuge and now we are going to draw what we did before and after?***
>
> *Interviewer*   *That's exactly right you are super onto it.*
>
> ***Kauri***   ***I'm not very good at drawing.***
>
> *Interviewer*   *Well you don't have to be an expert drawer, you can write or talk as well if that's better.*

Similarly, Isla (12) pondered her preference when asked if she wanted to draw a picture. Instead, she chose to write down her vision of an 'ideal refuge setting'. She explained that she is better able to 'see' it when it is written, as she can revise and add detail. I encouraged children to tell their stories through whatever means they liked, and they variably chose to draw pictures, use writing to story their experiences, or share these through demonstrative re-telling. Hunter (9), for instance, exercised self-determination by taking charge of his drawing process.

> *Interviewer*   *This could be the 'dream Refuge' whatever it would look like.*
>
> ***Hunter***   ***Whatever I want.***
>
> *Interviewer*   *Exactly, how many rooms do you think it needs?*
>
> ***Hunter***   ***I don't know, I can put as many as I want!***

In addition to children's focused input, I spent much of the interview time engaging in funny, absurd chat and enjoying the humour and laughter of the children, as these were central to their comfort and confidence whilst participating. They showed children's individual personality and their capacity to have fun and interact. Accordingly, I viewed these as important indicators of children's contentment with the relational experience, as illustrated by my exchange with Kahurangi (10) and Tai (8).

Interviewer	*Have you guys seen glow worms?*
Kahurangi	***I love them.***
Tai	***There are big caves of them.***
Kahurangi	***I want to eat one.***
Interviewer	*You want to eat a glow worm?*
Kahurangi	***Yeah.***
Interviewer	*Maybe your belly will glow if you eat glow worms!*
Kahurangi	***I'm an alien!!***

CONSENT – AFTER

Rose (7) and Elijah (5) left no doubt about their feelings at the conclusion of their interview. As the youngest family group represented, and the first interview conducted, it was important to gauge how the experience was for them. Children often made conversations and interactions easy with their matter-of-fact nature; Rose, without any prompting made a sincere announcement when her interview wrapped.

> **Rose**   ***I am happy right now.***
> *Interviewer*   *That is good. I feel happy too.*
> **Elijah**   ***Me too***

Children discussed their right to play back the voice and video recordings of their interviews and decide whether these could then be used by the researchers. Tai (8) asserted this right at the conclusion of the first interview, and in doing so reflected his understanding of how he could give or rescind consent.

> *Interviewer*   *Well you have answered heaps of questions and given me so*
>   *many good ideas.*
> **Mum**   ***That is awesome.***
> **Tai**   ***I want to hear it.***
> *Interviewer*   *Shall I stop this now then?*
> **Kahurangi**   **Yeah.**
> *Interviewer*   *Okay we can hear our funny voices.*

Reggie's (5) Mum witnessed his use of the stop sign during his first interview. She encouraged him to use it to when he wanted to after interviews had finished, so he could continue to indicate his consent at home. Upon my arrival for his second interview, Reggie left the room unprompted and returned with the stop sign. When I asked him if he could explain its significance to his older brother Hunter (9), he stated that "the questions will stop" when he holds up the sign. Their mother sent a text a week after the final interview, which read "[the] stop sign is on our table to remind them [the boys] they have the right to say stop". The viability of such tools to establish continuity in children's learning about concepts such as consent was demonstrated by Reggie and his Mum's use of the 'stop' sign in other contexts.

Emma's (6) Mum sent a text with Emma's feedback (that Emma had pre-approved), captured in a photo of a page of her journaling. Emma described her initial interview experience, which

demonstrated her continued desire to be involved in the research process, and how valuable the individualised attention on children was to their reciprocal investment in their participation.

Emma (Age 7)

The text reads: "next Wensday Cleo is coming back from Wellington we are going to anser some qujin about us. Cleo is so so so much fun that I want to see her eveyday"

CONCLUDING CONSENT

In this chapter, we have highlighted children's nuanced understanding of the concept of consent using excerpts from their interviews. In particular, we have highlighted children's responses to explanations of consent, their enactment of autonomy in giving consent, their enthusiasm, and the ease with which they practiced and displayed the boundaries of their consent. Not only were children demonstrably able to 'grasp' consent as a concept, they were also able to interpret nuances of consent and apply these in the contexts of their own participation and, importantly, beyond the interview setting. The implications of these stories of children's participation are twofold. First, they portray children's capacity to negotiate and exercise autonomy in a setting that prioritises their comfort and confidence, beginning with relational engagement that centres them and their experiences. Second, they underline how engagement with children can foster the acquisition of skills and concepts that can be meaningfully transferred to external concepts when the continuity of their practise opportunities are supported by their mothers.

Chapter Two: Before Refuge

Hey kids! We love how you made this chapter so awesome. Here, we talk about some hard things; we speak about what things were like for you before you came to Refuge, and all the feelings you had! Without your stories we would not have realised that we need to totally change the way we think about you.

We had our adult brains on at the start of our time together, and you showed us what we need to do to get our brains truly understanding what you need. We must always put you first! You helped us figure out (actually, you told us straight up, and it took us longer to understand) that we need to see you all as clients of Refuge before we even meet you. It is not enough to know that you use our services with your Mums, we need to get Refuge properly ready for you to arrive.

This means thinking about you before we meet you. It means getting the right people and spaces to welcome you properly. You had some great ideas about who the staff at Refuge needed to be and what you want and expect from the people you meet at Refuge. Staff need to be able to laugh and joke with you. You liked knowing that staff would ask about violence and talk about your safety; our staff must be brave because you are all so brave. We now understand some of the ways we can make things easier for you, because you have already been through enough, and after all we are the adults.

OVERVIEW OF 'BEFORE'

The 'before' chapter encompasses children's reflections of their experiences in the temporal phase until and including the point that they access support from Women's Refuge for the first time. As we explain further in the appended methods section, our interviewing approach was oriented toward facilitating children's storying and meaning-making of their experiences of Refuge, rather than of the entirety of their family context and exposure to violence. Accordingly, while some children did discuss aspects of the violence they witnessed or had been aware of, the principal focus was on the ways they reflected on their arrival at (and introduction to) Refuge, and their remembering of what stood out most for them throughout that period.

To set the scene for these stories of accessing Women's Refuge, we must keep children's contexts of exposure to family violence (or to impacts of this violence on their family units, as summarised in the literature overview) at the forefront of our minds. Understanding these events and their corresponding aftermath then becomes a precondition to situating children's immediate histories of violence, crisis, or distress within the stories that they tell, and to supporting them in ways that attempt to counter-balance rather than reinforce their felt powerlessness.

Their interview excerpts emphasise that the emotional burden infusing children's participation at Refuge is associated not only with particular tasks or imagined possible futures, but with the very introduction of the concept of Refuge, their first meeting with staff or other children, and their first entry into physical Refuge spaces. As we demonstrate throughout the 'before' chapter, children's experiences of the period spanning from when they first hear of Refuge through to their physical arrival is powerfully influential in shaping their emotional responses to and engagement with Refuge.

As you will read throughout this first findings chapter, the 'before' as a concept has immediately transferable applicability to how we consider children as individual clients who are accessing support. The literature overview appended to this report references the traditionally secondary prioritisation of children in service contexts. It sets out how children have in the past been regarded as an (important) accessory of their mothers, deserving of equivalent protection but presumed incapable of leading the negotiation of their own contexts. Conversely, in the findings of this research, exploring children's support experiences using the temporal phase of 'before' their engagement with Refuge is fully established offers an alternative portrayal of their capacity.

BEFORE – SETTING

Introduction

We begin this chapter with the 'setting' of children's experiences prior to their introduction to Refuge. As you will read, the standout feature of showcased interview excerpts is how little power, or certainty children feel in the lead-up to their arrival. In this 'settings' section, we introduce you to the ways that these children remembered both adults' decisions and the consequent changes to their own settings. Narratives of upheaval and powerlessness were threaded throughout participants' stories of transition, and we use excerpts of these stories to illustrate how these children construct and attribute meaning and emotion to these experiences.

Adults' decision-making

Children told many stories that allowed us to capture their positioning in the events that led them to Refuge. To frame their positioning, we begin with an examination of the ramifications that adults' decision-making had for children, and how this leads to sudden transitions between different settings. Decision-making adults may include perpetrating parents, safe parents, and advocates, among others. The decisions these adults make, such as to disrupt the safety of family functioning by using violence, or to expediently admit a family in need of help to a safehouse, or to escape the risk of further violence by leaving with one's children, all represent immediate changes to the settings of these children's lives.

We start with a decision made by Kahurangi's (10) and Tai's (8) Dad. Kahurangi talks about an argument her parents had where she recalls feeling very confused as her Mum and Dad told her differing accounts of the outcome of this big argument, and said:

> **Kahurangi**   **It is so sad.**
> Interviewer   *What is?*
> **Kahurangi**   **I was sad because mummy and dad kept on fighting. When mummy and him splited up because dad said they aren't splitting up and they did.**

The situation is expanded upon in the interviewer reflection note below:

> *Kahurangi told me about the memory of family violence that stands out most for her. Kahurangi confided that Dad has intentionally taken something very important to Mum because he knew it would upset her, and he wanted her to be upset. Both kids said it led to a big argument, with lots of yelling. Tai added detail as Kahurangi told her story*

but was noticeably uncomfortable when Kahurangi repeated the slur words she had heard in the argument. Tai would tense up, pulling away from us each time [slur word] was said. That word seemed bound up with Tai feeling afraid of Dad and afraid of arguments between his parents. I saw the 'freeze' response and reminded him he could use his stop sign, which was beside his hand. He nodded in acknowledgement and as Kahurangi continued, he tapped it to show he was done with that topic. Kahurangi obliged Tai's request and in immediately wrapping up her story she suggested that we all do an art challenge.

Kahurangi is able to articulate the sadness she felt about this situation and can discern and communicate the subtleties of her Dad's coercive tactics, only stopping when Tai uses his consent tool to halt the discussion. Kahurangi has completed a Refuge children's programme, and although she speaks openly about her parent's separation, she still feels sadness. The recounting of Kahurangi's story highlights two important issues: first, the capacity of a 10-year-old child to be attuned to and competently articulate both the dynamics of intimate partner violence and its impacts on her; and second, her need for a dedicated space to process experiences that remain at the forefront of her mind, especially following the culmination of the children's programme that she attended. Her context prior to Refuge was punctuated by external conflict (i.e. the violence from her Dad to her Mum) and by internal conflict (i.e. whose account of events to believe and her confusion over how to reconcile these). The decisions made by her Dad therefore textured her experience of her family, and continued to texture her experience of Refuge, underlining the paramountcy of children's programmes that facilitate children's processing of their experiences, including experiences with their fathers.

The next example of adult decision-making draws on Kaia's (10) story. Here, she is reflecting on the process she, her Mum, and her sister went through before being invited to stay at a safehouse. Like other children and their mothers, their family needed to travel for hours to get to the safehouse. Kaia describes her Mum driving away from their home with her and her sister. Their car was packed with the immediate essentials only, and Mum made a pit stop at a petrol station to make a phone call.

Kaia	**And I've never been here [the region, or to Women's Refuge]. Yes but we stopped and Mum called this Woman Refuge.**
Interviewer	And what did Women's Refuge say when Mum called them?
Kaia	**It took a few minutes for them to call and then they said we can come.**

Kaia (Age 10)

Kaia then recalled waiting for them to call back with a decision about whether they would have somewhere to stay that night, and "feeling worried". Her memory of those 'few minutes' profoundly demonstrates the power that advocates have over children's thoughts and feelings in the moment of crisis as well as their eventual outcomes, even prior to ever actually meeting them for the first time. Kaia and her sister knew what the phone call to Refuge meant, and therefore what was at stake if they were not invited to stay in the safehouse, and this is represented in Kaia's picture above. Without having yet met or spoken with an advocate themselves, and without receiving any information directly from anyone at Refuge, they were aware that they were at the mercy of advocates' decisions and had no input into or control over what these decisions would be.

Finally, the third example illustrating impacts of adult decision-making is of Ana's (12) comprehension of the gravity of their situation as her Mum drove her and her sister away from the place of violence and toward anticipated safety. Before presenting her drawing, Ana confides that her Mum has taken them away from the violence before, but that they had to travel further this time. She describes the weight of anxiety and turmoil that she feels about going, explaining that in addition to "how are we going to do this?, the worries in her head included "what's going to happen?" and "we have done this before, will it work this time?

Interviewer	What is happening in your picture?
Ana	**That is us in the car coming down to [place name].**
Interviewer	That is you in the car coming down to [place name], so is that you in the back of the car?
Ana	**Yeah.**
Interviewer	And what is happening?
Ana	**Thinking 'how are we going to do this?'**
Interviewer	You're thinking how are we going to do this?
Ana	**Yes.**
Interviewer	What is in your thought bubble?
Ana	**Me dragging me across the ground.**
Interviewer	You're dragging yourself across the ground.

Ana (Age 11)

By imagining that she is dragging herself across the ground as she looks out of the rear window of her Mum's car, Ana is depicting the internal struggle she faces as she attempts to make sense of her situation. She explained that the version of herself in the picture feels "confused" and is considering lots of possible futures and the risks of each of these. Simultaneously, she expressed that the prospect of Refuge and what that might mean for her was largely unknown, and she was uncertain about what would happen when they arrived. As with the previous two examples, Ana's immediate reality and her perception of what lay ahead were (in this instance, protective) the result of decisions made by adults. In the following section, we show how these experiences of

uncertainty and upheaval in the immediate aftermath of exposure to violence are imbued with a deeply felt sense of powerlessness and precarity.

Upheaval

As illustrated above, children are active participants in the process of leaving a context of violence, but the process by which they access safety is contingent on decision-making by adults around them. They are left with a sense of confusion, uncertainty, and worry as a result of what they describe as complex situations of experiencing and escaping violence, leading to a pervasive sense of precarity about their futures. This confusion and uncertainty coupled with children's awareness of and insight into the behaviours and choices by both parents creates an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness. Upon children's arrival at or introduction to Refuge, this powerlessness and precarity already form an important part of the setting of Refuge support for them.

Leila (13), Isla (12), and Evan (7) were part of a sibling group and were interviewed together. Their mother put a lot of emphasis on their education and reading together and discussing different topics were regular family activities. Consequently, much boisterous sibling debate preceded their reflections of their emotional experiences. After finally selecting a laminated character, who was characterised as a child about to enter a safehouse, Evan exclaimed "I have the greatest name of all!" After a dramatic pause, he announces the name: "... George'". When we asked what 'George' was thinking, Leila replies that "he's a little sad, because he had to leave his school and friends behind". Evan, the youngest sibling, commented "I remember how it [the safehouse] looked and stuff, but I don't remember everything that happened". He went on to say that 'George' might be sad sometimes, but he was also happy, because "he gets to start a whole new life". They went on to debate George's hypothetical experiences, commenting on how difficult it is to "start again" and leave the communities, schools, and friends that had been enmeshed in their lives, especially to move to a distant new town. However, they also recalled knowing that the purpose was to "be safe" and that their Mum was instigating these changes for their safety.

Similarly, Leila drew a picture with two contrasting depictions of herself. The 'before' picture was a sketch of her life just prior to entering the safehouse, and the 'after' picture portrays her life now. In the first, she has nothing around her.

Leila (Age 13)

When invited to tell us about her picture, with its grim expression and blank surroundings, she explained "Before I wasn't really sure - am I happy? Am I sad? Am I scared? I don't know." She remembered a complex feeling that she could not find words for. Conversely, in her 'after' drawing, she is beaming (and wrote the word "new page" to underline her smile's significance) and is surrounded by the objects and people that symbolise meaning and joy in her life. She described each of the objects and said "the 'after' me is happy. Super happy. With my jazz hands and doing a little jump." Despite this eloquent description of the longer-term impacts of such a significant transition, Leila's 'before' picture represents the confusion, uncertain, and immense change that accompanied the upheaval in her own and her siblings' lives. Her remembering of the moment immediately preceding her introduction to Refuge showed a feeling too complex to voice, and the sudden dispossession of comforting and familiar objects that had been at her home.

Both Leila's drawing and the siblings' character trajectory reinforce the juxtaposition of profound loss and positively constructed imagined and actual futures. Loss and distress were associated with being taken away from both objects and settings that had been associated with comfort and security; imagined futures were associated with the freedom to begin anew in a safe and certain setting. While desired, the transition from the former to the latter was marked by excruciating change. Their articulation of the strong emotions they attached to this upheaval underlined the

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influence that their comprehension of transitory situations had on the meanings they ascribed to them, and, accordingly, their emotional processing of these situations.

Conclusion

The 'setting' section of this chapter has focused on how children's experiences are governed by the decisions of adults. These included both the perpetrating adults' decisions to use violence, and protective adults' decisions and steps toward extricating children from violence. Even if these decisions are necessary, and positively orient children's later experiences, the periods of transition that these engender can be excruciatingly catalysed by intense feelings, loss, and change. They are also associated with a sense of powerlessness and uncertainty for these children. On the other hand, you will also have seen throughout this section that when children understand why their safe parent is making decisions, how their day to day lives might change, and what imagined futures they can be part of creating, they can assimilate this knowledge into their anticipation of what lies ahead, and into their attribution of meaning for experiences they are leaving behind.

In sum, while adults make decisions for and on behalf of children, the way children are supported to construct meaning from these decisions, and process the implications for themselves, plays an integral role in how equipped they feel to navigate changes. These experiences are explored further in the following section, which focuses on the 'self' as storied by children. The 'self' section expands upon the mechanisms through which children's backdrop of family violence and their introductions to Refuge give rise to individual emotional experiences and particularised thought processes.

BEFORE – SELF

Introduction

The previous section illustrated participants' recollections of upheaval and powerlessness, and underlined the intensity of children's emotional experiences as they face significant change in their family lives. This section further explores children's emotional responses to events impacting their families and to consequent transitions. It demonstrates the depth and complexity of children's felt emotions, paralleling the emotional responses of adult (primary) victims. Importantly, some of the children simultaneously describe feelings of immense relief at these changes upon entering a new and comforting environment. As we consider how transitions evoke emotional responses from children, we look particularly at constraints to their emotional expression, and how participants sometimes default to basic explanations of emotions even when demonstrating complex emotional processing. Next, we explore how these sudden changes in children's lives give rise to worry about their families and their futures. Finally, we highlight some of the ways that children make sense of their feelings by drawing on their own relational experiences in the context of crisis and change, and how they use these to anticipate, understand, and empathise with other children.

Risk and relief

Two distinct experiences accentuate the extent to which children's negotiation of crisis and post-crisis transitions parallel those of primary victims; namely, their preoccupation with safety, and their feelings of relief.

When children first have contact with Women's Refuge, their anticipation of possible danger suffuses their everyday thinking and planning. In interviews, this manifested in continual revisiting of the notion that the foremost housing consideration should be "will the house be locked and safe?" Similarly, their selection of 'good' objects to have in a new environment revolved around access to safety in risky situations; children emphasised the need for clothes ("in case you have to leave quickly") and games to play ("in case you're stuck somewhere"). Jax (7) offered that he thought the most important would be "a phone to call people, in case you are in trouble".

Although the functional steps to ensure safety are generally regarded as an adult responsibility, the prospect of sudden violence coloured many of the children's seemingly incidental descriptions of the ideal environment. Every participant demonstrated this concern with physical risk; some articulated it more frequently than others. Charlotte (9), for example, kept returning to her fear of

once again being confronted with the perpetrator's violence, saying "but what if it happens again?" Charlotte sees her Dad regularly, and so this potential outcome feels both possible and proximal to her life, indicating the importance of transparent communication about these continuing relationships and children's perceptions of risk. This continual preoccupation with a principally adult concern is noteworthy for multiple reasons: it reinforces the equivalence between adults' and children's cognitive priorities and emotional impacts after violence, highlights some of the ways that children's experiences of violence constrain their sense of ongoing safety, and signals the need for practice imperatives to ameliorate their protracted worry without devaluing or invalidating their basis for the worry.

As with their recurrent emphasis on safety, children's articulation of profound relief following perceived amelioration of risk emphasises the intensity of their experiences alongside those of adults. As set out earlier in this chapter, Leila (13), Isla (12) and Evan (7) assigned thoughts and feelings to their hypothetical character, a laminated figure named George. They were contemplative about George's reality as he prepared to enter a safehouse and were able to quickly express how they believed he might feel and relate this to their own experiences.

> **Leila**   *It depends really.*
> **Isla**   *Maybe a bit relieved by his situation?*

Isla (12) suggested that their character may feel relieved by his situation. As is typical of child interviews, this was framed as a question, suggesting that she believed there was a 'correct answer'. Once Isla was reassured that relief was a valid supposed feeling, she continued to suggest that despite the upheaval George would face, he would be relieved to be afforded some respite from his previous landscape of family violence. Arguably, this illustrates her projection of relief onto the hypothetical child client as a stark contrast to the pervasive preoccupation with safety that precipitated her own entry into the safehouse. Awhina (10) describes similar relief, saying that when she learned she would be going to Women's Refuge, she felt "a little bit scared and a little bit happy", and through further dialogue insinuated that the 'little bit happy' was her conceptualisation of relief at being in a safe space with her family, despite their unknown future. Interestingly, their articulation of relief is grounded in the gains in physical safety that they perceive Refuge as offering, rather than other forms of safety that they show preoccupation with.

Children's persistent preoccupation with further potential risk to physical safety also signals their implicit awareness of and insight into the perpetrating parent's pattern of violence. They did not appear to situate their exposure to violence as either solely historical or a series of discrete events,

but rather as an ongoing cycle that traversed their past experiences and their imaginings of the future. This, too, has implications for how children might be supported upon their entry to Refuge; their perceptions of the likelihood of further violence (and risk) are equally as discernible in their narratives as their recollections of past violence.

Equivalence of emotion

Exploring and making plans to address the needs of clients throughout multiple domains of their lives, including emotional and relational, is a core Refuge tenet, but traditionally this has principally focused on Mums as primary clients. Children's descriptions of their emotions and concerns illuminate how children's transitions to Refuge after exposure to family violence reflect a similar intensity, depth, and span of needs and vulnerabilities as adults, even if differentially manifesting. Children's expressions of these emotions and corresponding vulnerabilities are demonstrated here by Ihaka (9) and Charlotte (9) as they explain their drawings of themselves immediately prior to accessing Refuge.

Ihaka explained that in his picture, his rosy cheeks were because he was nervous. He explained that he felt a feeling in his tummy that was "kind of a cool feeling, kind of a nervous feeling, like kind of cool." Our impression was that the words he used were comparable to more adult descriptions of feelings of anticipation and apprehension. Ihaka clearly evidenced his ability to link his feelings with the way his body responded.

Ihaka (Age 9)

Charlotte, on the other hand, defaults to articulating thoughts rather than bodily sensations. In her interview, she tells us about her drawing of herself before entering Women's Refuge, saying she was "standing there wondering, what am I going to be doing?" Her voice as she tells us this evokes a visceral sense of vulnerability. It conjures a powerful image of Charlotte as a nine-year-old child standing alone, having to make sense of her experiences of violence and about to navigate a new, entirely unknown context.
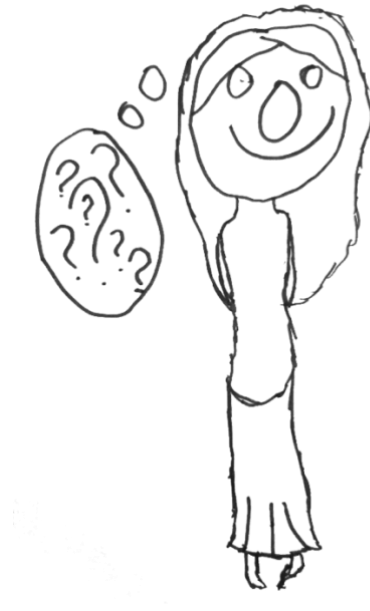
Charlotte (Age 9)

Both physical representations of emotion (as with Ihaka's explanation) and the articulation of worries to give rationale to strong feelings (as with Charlotte's explanation) were demonstrated by the other children throughout their interviews. For example, Kaia (10) told us she had drawn herself 'shaking' as she faced the prospect of entering Refuge, while Kauri (8) said "I would be covering my face a little bit" about that same circumstance. The children also variously described their emotions as "overwhelmed [and] obnoxiously excited" (Charlotte, 9), "scared" (Emma, 6), "quite scared" (Ambrose, 8), "weird", "cool", and "nervous" (Ihaka, 9, and Kauri, 8), "confused" (Isla, 12), "confused and excited" (Evan, 7), and "sad" and "worried" (Leila, 13).

Finally, without using an emotional term as such (i.e. anxious, self-conscious, or apprehensive) children could explain these emotions perfectly adequately by describing the 'trigger' for them instead. For instance, with using gestures to indicate intensity or overwhelm, they offered explanations like "because I didn't know everyone" (Ambrose, 8), "because I was going to meet

new kids" (Ihaka, 9), "because it's a new situation" (Isla, 12), "[because they were] leaving behind what they knew" (Leila, 13), and "I hoped they were nice people" (Kauri, 8). We did not attempt to compile a complete snapshot of children's descriptors of their feelings but rather offer a sample that spans the full age range of participants, even this sample exhibits children's evolving capacities to use language they are comfortable with to communicate the strength of their emotions.

Children's range of descriptors, especially in conjunction with Ihaka's and Charlotte's explanations of their pictures, has dual benefits. First, it drives home the intensity of children's feelings, and the range of emotions and thoughts that they experience after crisis and upheaval. Second, it suggests that children are inherently capable and willing to articulate their feelings, provided they are supported to do so in an environment they are comfortable in, and that the people supporting them recognise the validity and the significance of their expression. In other words, children are telling us how they feel; the onus is on us to hear them.

In one reflection entry we made after reviewing a child interview, we theorised that when listening to children's accounts of their experiences, we (and others) perhaps tend to automatically (and wrongly) equate the immaturity of children's emotional expression to an immaturity of the emotions themselves. However, children's explorations of their experiences here appear to signify the reverse - that while their language and explanation of emotion is typical of childlike expression, the depth of these is equivalent to adult emotions. Kaia's reference to herself "shaking", for example, may at first glance seem like a casual child remark, but may simultaneously (as in this circumstance) represent the underlying intensity of anxiety or fear. Similarly, Kauri's 'I would be "covering my face a little bit" could be interpreted as childlike dramatism, *or* could be recognised as a child's response to intense fear or shame, and these emotional experiences (and the equivalence of these to adult experiences) could be valued or devalued accordingly. In sum, juvenile expression does not mean emotions are felt with a lesser intensity.

Children's communication of emotion

The emergence of children's discussions of meaning-making occurred principally within their explanations of their drawings. Reflecting after these interviews, we noted that our first assumptions of their drawings and of their initial verbal answers were markedly different to that which emerged after setting aside our predetermined expectations of both what they might say (i.e., descriptions consistent with our adult understanding of violence and support) and what their words meant (i.e., a developmentally appropriate expression of feeling). We demonstrate how

easily children's constraints in articulating feeling can be confused for an absence of intense feeling using Awhina's explanation of her picture.

Awhina (Age 10)

> **Interviewer**   *And what's this? [pointing to question mark in thought bubble]*
> **Awhina**   ***I didn't know what was happening.***

In this instance, Awhina's answer did not suggest she had no feelings or perceptions, but rather that these could not be easily expressed and may not be fully understood, even by her. Her subsequent responses also, quite literally, state that she did not know what was happening (and therefore how to feel). Multiple conclusions can be drawn from this: Awhina, as a ten-year-old child equipped with just a backpack and about to enter a safehouse, had little knowledge of what had happened and what was going to happen next. Her response 'I don't know' needed to be heard as an important and honest answer in of itself, rather than being met with further prompting. Awhina had just clearly illustrated how in the absence of age-appropriate information being communicated, she simply did not have the capacity to answer differently. Next, we look at how this was equally evidenced through Charlotte's dialogue.

Charlotte (Age 9)

In Charlotte's drawing, she was uncertain about what might happen next for her and was embedded in a situation that was chaotic, changeable, and at times unsafe. However, the question marks in her drawing do not represent an *absence* of emotions, but rather a lack of being able to articulate them as an adult might. This feeling of 'not knowing' enough to feel confident, or of having feelings with 'no words' was shared by many children. They expressed feelings of uncertainty, especially in relation to the practical next steps of what would happen in their lives – they were unsure where they would be going next or what (and who) the day-to-day realities of their lives might feature in the short- and medium-term futures.

These examples highlight two key points regarding children's expression of emotions and perceptions. The first relates to the capacity constraints that children face in articulating their emotional experiences in forms accessible to adults, which evolve as part of normative child development stages. As evidenced throughout, older children typically put forward more sophisticated verbal descriptions of feeling than the younger participants. The second relates to the role of child-targeted support, and the corresponding extent to which children are supported to communicate their own experiences. Without this targeted support, the complex understandings and feelings they attribute to their own experiences cannot be fully understood and catered for.

Drawing on relational experiences

As their voices and drawings show, children are not passive bystanders or thoughtless participants in family experiences. Ihaka (9), for example, discusses his anxiety about starting a

children's programme, and how his apprehension about what that could be like was informed by the closest reference point he had, saying "[it was] because I was going to like, meet new kids, and kind of like I'd never been in a group of kids before. School is the only group I have ever been in.

This was reinforced by Kahurangi's (10) and her brother Tai's (8) contemplation of how they felt before starting their refuge programme. Kahurangi recalled feeling unsure and anxious about what would happen in the children's programme, and how people might interact with her. Of her own volition, she decided within the interview that she wanted to welcome and introduce other children to refuge so they did not feel similarly scared. To demystify what participation in a children's programme might be like, she proposed that a video to show to new children might help to inform their expectations and alleviate their worries, and would give them advance knowledge of the space and setup to help them to feel comfortable and confident about being there.

At the completion of the interview, we tested out her idea. She held the camcorder and directed an example video where she came in the front door of Refuge, shakily pointing the camcorder at all the things of importance to her while narrating her thoughts. This included the kitchen, bathrooms, and wall posters. She lingered at a poster setting out the impacts of family violence on children, which was significant to her because she recalled it helping her understand and validate her experience as a child. The camcorder was then pointed at the beanbags, the chalk, the table and chairs, the fluffy mat, the teddy bears, and children's artwork. She felt that if children can notice the comfortable and child-appropriate furniture and see child-focused material, they may not feel so scared, worried, or uncomfortable.

Evidently, Kahurangi remembered the uncertainty she initially felt, and which she believed other children would also feel. She used this as the basis to identify strategies to develop other children's knowledge and positive anticipation of what their participation at Refuge could involve. In doing this, she recognises that every child is an individual client and a new client. She illuminates the weight of expectation and participation that is placed upon these new clients. Her priority was therefore to use her 'expert status' (a concept we affirmed throughout interviews) as a programme graduate to create a resource that bridges children's uncertainty with child-specific and relatable content. We discuss how information is constructed and imparted to children in subsequent findings chapters, but signal here the value of using children's voices to guide this.

As with Kahurangi, other children's thoughts and and feelings about their experiences of Refuge were often voiced as part of their identification with other (including hypothetical) children's experiences. For instance, when Charlotte (9) created her character, Bobbita, she raised similar concerns to Kahurangi about how Bobbita might feel if not equipped with appropriate information. She suggests that the way that Bobbita might be feeling mirrors the way she felt before she started her refuge programme:

> Interviewer *What is there to be nervous about?*
> **Charlotte   *Because they [Bobbita] have never done it before, and they don't know what it's about, because that was how I was feeling. She doesn't know anyone there, because I didn't know anyone there, and that was one thing I was nervous about...What do they do [there], like what am I going to be doing?***

As with Ihaka and Kahurangi, Charlotte is principally focused on children's (including her own) anxiety about the programme prior to starting. However, through this exchange, she also exemplifies the value of hearing from children about their experiences. As with other children interviewed in this study, Charlotte articulates her wishes for other kids in relation to her own experiences of Refuge. This was consistent with other participants; throughout their interviews; children continually returned to and expressed their concern for other children in similar situations. As you will note in Charlotte's elucidation of the challenges she predicted Bobbita would face, children's explanations of their internal experiences are often transferable to other children. Using this 'expert status' offered by children offers the opportunity to elevate the child voice and centre it both in our understanding of children's needs and in our communication to children.

Conclusion

In this 'self' section, we have explored the ways children represent 'self' experiences and how they make sense of their thoughts, emotions, and challenges as they are introduced to the idea of Women's Refuge. During and immediately following crisis and transition periods, children are plagued with persistent worry about safety and the amorphous prospect of future risk to themselves and their families. This endures in the absence of child-specific strategies to address this in its entirety. Simultaneously, they also allude to feelings of relief that pervade their recollections of their introduction to Refuge, and which they (like adults) associate with their perception that the possibility of imminent harm to themselves and their families has (if only temporarily) receded.

Taken together, children's perceptions of both risk and relief suggest that while they regard Women's Refuge as a source of physical safety, they are not met with a response that recognises their emotional, cognitive, and social progression through transition as equivalent to adults'. The honouring of children's expression and their own understanding of 'self' at the inception of their Refuge experience offers potential not just for greater attunement to children's stories, but also of the transferability of these to the design of support strategies for other children. Attunement and attention to children's experiences is explored in greater detail in the next section, which sets out their interactions with the 'other' at this point in their journeys.

BEFORE – OTHER

Introduction

The previous section of this chapter set out children's 'self' experiences, focusing particularly on the individual experiencing of children's key concerns about safety, their feelings of relief as they anticipated a reprieve from their previously risk-saturated home contexts, and the acute emotional and cognitive processing of events in their lives. Here, we turn our attention to the role of the 'other' in shaping children's experiences of accessing support, and to the complex interplay between children's interpersonal experiences and the ways they cope with, conceptualise, and communicate their thoughts and feelings at the commencement of their relationships with Women's Refuge.

Children's narratives featured a range of characters. We have chosen to focus principally on the roles that advocates played in children's 'before' experiences, since these were instrumental in shaping the beginning of the Refuge experience for participants. Accordingly, we highlight children's characterisation of other people in their lives, including Mum, Dad, and other children, in subsequent chapters. The roles that these characters play and the characteristics that they show in their very first interactions set the scene for children's engagement at Refuge. Children's contributions exceeded all of our expectations of them: far from simply reciting a set of desired attributes or resources as a fantasy 'checklist', children offered abundant and critical discussion about what constituted a supportive experience for them.

Advocates

Advocates featured more commonly in children's narratives of their introduction to Refuge than any other group of 'other' characters. Participants expended tremendous time and effort to painstakingly communicate what they regarded as paramount in their interactions with these advocates, and this was richly detailed, authentic, and in most cases unintentional. Rather, their points were woven throughout their remembered realities of arriving at Refuge, and what this looked and felt like. Much of this was positive; they relayed memories of feeling supported and cared for and related these feelings to positive interactions with Refuge staff. At the same, they gave us retrospective analyses of their own needs at the time of their entry to Refuge. Kauri (8), who preferred to talk rather than draw, easily found his way to the core of what helped him feel safe at Refuge at the beginning.

Interviewer	*Did you talk a lot on your first day?*
Kauri	***No.***
Interviewer	*I don't believe you*
[everyone laughs]	
Kauri	***No, because I was too shy and when I'm really shy I don't talk as much.***
Interviewer	*And what helped you be not shy?*
Kauri	***That they [advocates] said 'you don't need to be shy' and 'we are with you', nobody is mean and nobody is sad...'only sometimes they are sad, but they are cool' and yeah.***
Interviewer	*When they said* "we are with you"*, how did you feel?*
Kauri	***I felt safe.***

Whether these exact words were uttered by the advocate that Kauri spoke to is less important than the meaning he took from their interaction, which was patently a welcoming message of inclusion. For Kauri, this first interaction was a positive one, and the primary feeling that it engendered in him was one of safety. This excerpt suggests that his priorities at that moment were safety and reassurance, mirroring his anticipation about potential hostility. The advocate's immediate reassurance validated his feelings and provided a robust foundation for his relationship with both the advocate and the other children in the programme. His recollection of the advocates' words "we are with you" suggests that to Kauri, this embodied togetherness, community and understanding.

Charlotte's articulation of what children need in a first encounter with advocates does not make explicit her similar trepidation but insinuates it through her privileging of implicit signs that advocates are kind and polite.

Interviewer	*So when a kid comes through the door at Refuge what do they actually need from all the adults on the staff here.*
Charlotte	***A hello so they know they are polite.***

Charlotte's story focuses on children needing reassurance that the adults they meet are kind. Similarly to Kauri, while Charlotte does not mention that this is a concern of hers, the message that she gives is indicative of feeling worried about who she will encounter. She is asking that advocates give immediate reassurance that they are safe and kind. She goes on to say that children will need "comforting if they're shy." As the 'self' section in this chapter demonstrates, 'shy' may be a catch-all term for worry and anxiety as well as self-conscious feelings. Charlotte, in short, suggests that first encounters have an integral role in ameliorating children's felt emotions

at the time of their arrival, and this is reiterated in Hunter's (9) comment about making children feel welcome.

> *Interviewer* *So my question is if you were a worker here what would you do with all the kids when they came in?*
> **Hunter** ***I would say welcome, I hope you enjoy it here.***

Almost all of the other children also spoke persuasively (and often spontaneously) about the requirement for a good advocate to show certain characteristics. The foremost of these was the concept of warmth, which they referenced in their descriptions of advocates' initial greetings, overall demeanours, and tone of voice. When asked what needed to happen for kids to feel 'happy', children's responses included "a full tummy", "a safety bubble", "being surrounded by the right people", "lots of support", and "having fun". Significantly, they went on to say that for these preconditions of happiness to be met, the advocates they interacted with would need to "be nice", "be able to chill", "be welcoming", and demonstrate "friendliness" and a "warm tone of voice". Children stressed that advocates needed to already possess these skills and characteristics so that they would be evident from the first interaction.

To give children a sense of security in the process, incorporating 'fun' alongside 'care' was also regarded as paramount. Isla (12) explains that advocates needed to be "both friendly and fun". As articulated by Charlotte, without both, it "would get boring for the advocate and the person in group". Kauri seconds this, saying the best advocates "were really careful and they made sure everyone had fun". Ambrose, Jax and Emma collectively indicate how skilled advocacy incorporates play and care through the following passage:

> *Interviewer* *So what do you think when kids come here, what do you think would be really helpful for them?*
> **Ambrose** ***Encourage them.***
> *Interviewer* *To encourage them.*
> **Jax** ***Play games.***
> *Interviewer* *Who is going to encourage them?*
> **Emma** ***[Points to interviewer – Refuge staff]***
> *Interviewer* *We can encourage them yeah?*
> **Ambrose** ***Take care of them***

Several older children, including Leila (13) and Isla (12) then raised the need for approaches by advocates to take account of the contexts children have exited from, and create the conditions for these to be catered for at Refuge.

> *Interviewer*   *If you knew other people who were going [to Refuge], what do you think you would want the staff to know in advance?*
>
> **Leila**   **There would be a backstory.**
>
> *Interviewer*   *Yeah and why would that be important to know?*
>
> **Isla**   **So they know how to treat you, how much space you need if you need time to get ready, not ready, but what is comfortable in your pace.**

Here, Leila (13) posits that knowing a child's backstory would be a useful way to understand that child. Both Leila and Isla's comments suggest that staff need to have an awareness of the individual nature of experience, as well as a grounding in family violence. A 'backstory' might include children's demographic information, as well as what a child's history of exposure to violence has entailed. As suggested by Isla, advocates may be able to use this to tailor their interactions and responses to children's behaviour and emotions.

This was echoed by Charlotte (9), who told us that advocates should understand "that you have been having a hard time and you need help understanding what you need to do and know if something like that happens." Like Leila, and Isla, Charlotte situates the responsibility of recognising the layers of complexity in children's experiences firmly with advocates. She puts into children's terms various imperatives facing children's advocates, including to lead the relationship, to facilitate understanding of children's contexts and their responses to it, and to build safety and coping capacity.

Leila, Isla, and Charlotte all imply that children have differing experiences and that these correspond to differing reactions, behaviours, and needs (such as the presupposed need for 'space'). They put the onus to understand each child onto the advocates, and remind us that children's engagement will, more than likely, unfold at different paces and according to different children's capacities. Leila, who at 13 is the eldest of the participants, commented that it was vital for her to be "treated as an adult, but still a child kind of thing". Her age means she may navigate support slightly differently than other children and that she may be looking for respect and autonomy, and to be recognised as an individual, but on the other hand have the responsibility of relationship formation, and burden of care to sit firmly with an advocate.

Participants further point out fundamental helping skills that are crucial in walking alongside children effectively, especially in the aftermath of trauma. Charlotte (9) is especially forthcoming about what she regards as helping or hindering support for children, and what she believes

facilitates the opportunity for children to divulge their stories and build relationships with support figures.

> *Interviewer*   *What do you think an advocate would be able to do or help with?*
> **Charlotte**   **They would be able to listen… unlike other people, they would be able to listen and actually understand. Because unlike other people, like, when you say like two words, they [other people] immediately think they understand. But they [advocates] actually listen to every word and try to process it.**

Of particular importance here is Charlotte's reference to feeling unheard by 'other people' in her life. She is able to distinguish when adults genuinely listen and engage with her, and she can articulate her sense of attempting to communicate to those who are unwilling or unable to do this. At age nine, she has already determined that listening to and acknowledging a child's story of violence is pivotal to establishing trust and further self-disclosure. She also touches upon the 'try to process it' aspect of listening and responding to children, suggesting that simply hearing a child's story is not sufficient; this must be accompanied by demonstrated understanding. Charlotte's explanations of what constitutes a 'safe advocate' are eloquent and show a nuanced personal construction of the child-advocate relationship; as such, she offers a significant and unique perspective into the way children experience these interactions with advocates. 'Hearing' and 'processing' are aspects of advocates' responses to her that she can readily discern. Both necessitate a thorough grounding in trauma and in family violence, evidencing a consequent need for particular knowledge and skill sets, which will be discussed in later chapters of this report.

Conclusion

The findings relating to children's characterisation of 'other' are predicated on the ideal support experience that participants envisioned for other children, the way that feelings of comfort and safety were engendered for themselves and others through early impressions, and how the weight of the burden children carried when entering Refuge could be felt differently depending on the support they received. Perceiving warmth and feeling welcome were crucial aspects of this support that powerfully shaped children's construction of their initial Refuge experience. As illustrated by the excerpts of their dialogue, the appropriate weaving together of care, seriousness, and fun is part of the essential skill set that advocates need to be already equipped with. The combination of these contributes to children's subjective sense of safety. Ultimately, children's contributions highlight that children need to be treated as individuals with differing experiences,

and that advocates must be family violence specialists to respond adequately to children's experiences and needs. The mutual interdependence of these is further evidenced through the subsequent two findings chapters.

CONCLUDING THE 'BEFORE'

Children's experiences 'before' immersion into a Refuge service begins with violence. The point at which children either access a safehouse or enter a children's programme for the first time is typically preceded by an escalation of violence from the perpetrating parent to the safe parent. Accordingly, at the time of their arrival, they are already enduring a stressful and highly transitory family context, characterised by sudden change, acute emotional stress, and often a profound sense of loss or uncertainty.

The salience of the 'before' of children's stories is embedded in their recollections of uncertainty, anticipation, and apprehension. The data we have drawn upon here to sketch children's stories of arrival at Women's Refuge was textured with children's remembering of their emotional selves at the time, and with their descriptions of their very first impressions of Refuge. Collectively, these highlight the outcome expectations that children arrive with, and how these are shaped by a multitude of points of reference from their own lives, often in the absence of adequate, intentionally communicated information about what lies ahead for them. How confidently children can navigate their new setting and integrate their past experiences to access a sense of personal and familial safety then relies in part on how Refuges and advocates respond to and make space for children.

Organising the findings according to temporal phase enabled the simultaneous focus on children's experiences up to and including their introduction to Refuge, and contiguous focus on service design; in other words, how the service factors 'before' a child's arrival influences the child's introductory experience. Accordingly, this chapter has demonstrated some of the ways in which children's subjective experiencing of comfort and safety at Refuge is contingent on their initial interactions with staff and the skills, knowledge, and attributes that advocates are already equipped with prior to their interactions with children.

The messages that children communicated so vividly through these memories emphasised two key imperatives: that advocates are equipped with the skills to immediately and confidently respond to children in ways that make them comfortable, and that services are oriented toward and privilege children's experiences. In other words, children need advocates to show up, understand, be with children where they are at, and give children space, place, and time in ways that work for them.

Chapter Three: During Refuge

Kia ora kids! This section tells all your stories about what things were like for you when you were at Refuge, this may be your time in a safehouse, or the times you came to a children's programme. It talks about the different things you liked, and what you think is needed to make everything fun, safe, and more relaxed.

You told us that your worries do not stop when you are at Refuge. You said that you need time and safe places to practice what you learnt here because it can be hard work! You told us how important the people (especially the other kids) were, and what helped you feel like Refuge was your space. You spoke heaps about the other kids you met and all the kids who you imagine might know about Refuge, but who have not visited yet. You kept on surprising us with how much care you have for others and how you want everyone to enjoy their time at Refuge as much as you did.

We now understand that there are some things you would like to see made better, and some things we can put more effort into, so that more and more people can enjoy their time with us.

OVERVIEW OF 'DURING'

Children's situations prior to refuge are fraught with uncertainty and a heightened awareness of their environments. As the 'before' chapter evidenced, this culminates in a sense of powerlessness for children in these situations. Children's abilities to keenly observe their situations of violence are often reduced into a cautionary concept – a reminder that children are impacted by their exposure to violence and the behaviours they observe in their parents. Conversely, the 'before' chapter showcases how these same abilities enable children to comprehend and articulate the subtleties of their perpetrating parents' coercive behaviours. The 'during' chapter explores the temporal phase that begins with children's entry to the physical space of Women's Refuge and encompasses their experiences up until they have left Refuge services (or up until the present, for those still children still in safehouses).

The 'during' of children's recollections of Refuge has many parallels with their 'before'; we explore how children have identified their favourite aspects of Refuge, what they enjoyed and found comfort in, and the role that advocates played in encouraging children's 'meaning-making within those experiences.

This chapter visits the setting children find themselves in at Refuge, and their capacity to derive safety from the environments within a predominantly adult oriented service. While children's stories elicited overall contentment with their service experience (especially in relation to other children), they also identified areas for improvement. Children explained that although they are supported to feel physically and emotionally safe, they feel this could be further promoted by the targeted construction of their physical environments to appeal to children, and the purposeful initiation of children to the physical space of Refuge.

Children also focused on their learning in their stories of 'during'. They valued their own and others' acquisition of skills, and identified the limitations to embedding their learning, most notably the transferability of these skills to alternative settings. To them, programme learning was 'work', even when enjoyable, and their preoccupation with safety transcended facilitated opportunities for learning, spilling into their thoughts and their play at other times. Worry about future risk constituted a heavy mental workload and textured their imagined futures, and this was only partly ameliorated through safety planning within programmes. This chapter draws together these experiences of children in relation to how the different roles of adults shaped their experiences of being supported by Refuge.

DURING – SETTING

Introduction

Children's 'before' experiences were stressful, new, and confronting. Their 'during' stories paint a very different picture – one in which children have relaxed, have found relief, have made genuine connections, and have harnessed the power of the physical space and relational resources at Refuge to cope. In this chapter, we demonstrate children's apperception of advocates' responses to themselves and their families. Also the influence that both the environment and the structural continuity offered at Refuge had on children's perceptions of Refuge as a place where children can go.

Emotional climate 'during' Refuge

Children's descriptions of their 'best parts' of being at Refuge (whether in a safehouse or at a children's programme) told more about the value of their Refuge experience than simply an enjoyable memory. Kahurangi (10), for example, was asked what her "best thing about Refuge" was. To our surprise, she easily (and colourfully) drew and described the peace she felt while completing her children's programme. She earnestly described respect, both her wish to be respectful, and her appreciation of feeling respected whilst at Refuge. As she interpreted her pictures, she pointed her pen at me to the rhythm of each word she spoke, making sure I had truly understood her. She made it clear that she wanted her pictures to help other kids understand what was waiting for them at Refuge. She wanted to pass on her remembered sense of the important emotional climate.

Kahurangi (Age 10)

In contrast to her descriptions of 'before' accessing Refuge, which were punctuated by memories of fighting, uncertainty, and sadness, her drawing depicts her sense of peacefulness and feeling respected while at Refuge. This was shared by many of the children, who associated how they felt while they were at Refuge with their perceptions of the Refuge environment, which comprised space, place, people, and objects. We focus first on how the environment fostered 'play', and children's understanding of the significance and importance of play.

Playing

"TOYS, TOYS!"

Every child spoke about some aspect of 'play'. Some shouting out their appreciation, others' faces lighting up as they locked eyes with their siblings, and some carefully twirling the threads of a rug around their fingers while they reminisced. Taken at face value, 'play' appeared consistent with typical child preoccupations; children do, in general, like to have toys and to play. Accordingly, we did not initially recognise what else these stories signified until reflecting on this after the first two interviews. Only once we did were we able to hear children's representations of the symbolic importance of toys. Children alluded to the role of age-appropriate toys in engendering a feeling of belonging; of familiar toys in providing a sense of consistency, and of purposeful toys to infuse a new physical space with either old or longed-for routine, structure, and predictability. Their 'dream Refuge' and their wishes for other children entering Refuge was predicated on play, and the extent to which children's play would be permitted, encouraged, and resourced. In essence, such play is children's 'work', and is important and beneficial beyond keeping children occupied.

All of the children who experienced a safehouse mentioned the "playroom" and the variations of this within refuge. Even the eldest children, Leila (13) and Isla (12), fondly remember the playroom, immediately exclaiming that their favourite part of Refuge was "the big playroom with all the toys".

> Interviewer So what was good about the playroom?
> **Isla** *You could just make up anything about anything and well you could like pretend to be whatever and that was fun I guess.*
> **Leila** *There was a whole range of toys you could play with.*

This excerpt illustrates that the reasons children value toys transcend their entertainment value. Leila and Isla suggest that the objects in the safehouse that were age-appropriate held the most value for them, and that they knew such objects were targeted to them and were theirs to use.

Being able to create, to pretend, and to choose from an abundance of toys were all identified by them as significant.

Awhina's (10) and Aaria's (7) pictures of their favourite things at refuge were also centered around play. They drew the bikes and swings at the safehouse, and spoke fondly of the playroom. When I visited the safehouse, they showed me the playroom and chose to set up our interview there. Aaria (7) offered details about each toy in the playroom: her favourites were a book that had "funny pages", and a toy that had the "softest fur". Her intimate knowledge of the toys conveyed the value that they held for her, and the time and care she had taken, first to know her environment, and then to articulate its importance.

Awhina (Age 10) - with Aaria's (Age 7) suggestions

Similarly, I met with Ambrose (8), Jax (7), and Emma (6) in the playroom of a refuge office. They said they felt comfortable there, and at first they sat on chairs, but quickly moved to the "fluffy mats" to talk and draw. Their feeling of comfort was reiterated in their discussion about what they thought other children coming into Refuge might like.

> *Interviewer* *What would you get every single child that came here?*
> **Ambrose** **A playroom.**

Jax thought that a separate playroom for children was important "to keep the toys safe" so that they and others can continue to enjoy them. These three children also felt that having a separate playroom maintained the differentiation between space for play and space for learning in the

programme. For them, this distinction was important; one space for fun and play, the other for directed tasks, work, and learning. Ambrose emphasised the need for this distinction even while acknowledging that programmes involve games and activities, since the idea of 'play' in a programme was still divergent to the idea of free play or fun play elsewhere.

Hunter (9) and his brother Reggie (5) loved "the playroom, the toys and watching movies" at Refuge. Hunter's "all-time favourite" moment at Refuge was his birthday and the party that he shared with the other residents. At his party, he played outside, got lots of toys and felt "happy and safe".

> *Interviewer*   *How did you feel on your birthday when you were there [Refuge]?*
> **Hunter**   **You can probably tell by my face.**
> *Interviewer*   *And what is your face doing?*
> **Hunter**   **Smiling a big smile, I was happy**

Hunter (Age 9)

As we sat on the floor of Hunter's and Reggie's lounge listening to him describe his party, Hunter suddenly got up, went to his room and came back with some toys that he still had from his time at Refuge and showed us why they were special to him. Hunter has lived in two houses since staying at Refuge, and he and his Mum had made sure to keep these specific toys with him throughout these transitions.

Hunter's (9) next drawing was of his 'dream Refuge' – a space he thought children would find joy in. His drawing is filled with intricate details including a fridge, the elements on the oven, the oven handle, and a stack of DVDs. The couch he drew is positioned at an appropriate distance from the TV "so nobody gets sore eyes", and he has rules in place to keep TV watching orderly ("no

TV at night"!). The objects within his environment and the rules around engaging with this environment were important for Hunter. He continued to describe his drawing as he created each new part, saying "this is kind of like a little party room, you can have a party and eat. It has got, like, the dining room and [you can] listen to songs". He then declared:

Hunter	***We can't forget we need a little toy playroom!***
Interviewer	*So when you open the front door of this Refuge what is the first room?*
Hunter	***The playroom…that is my dream Refuge.***
Interviewer	*Do you think other kids would like to stay in this place?*
Hunter	***Probably.***
Interviewer	*How come?*
Hunter	***Like all the toys are in this basket but there are actually a lot of toys, like there are going to be toys all over the floor nearly.***
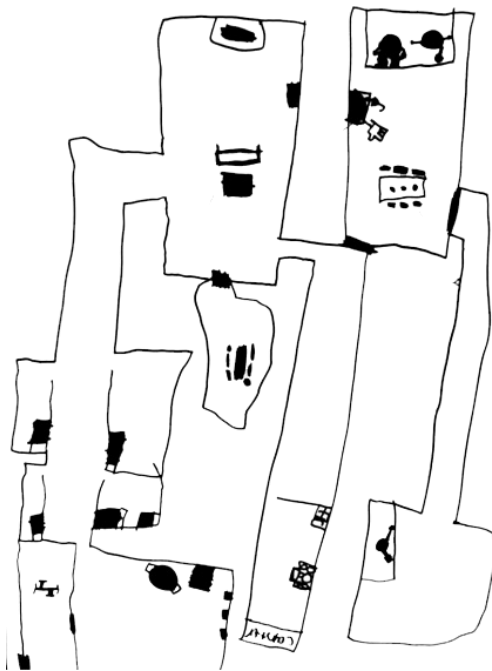
Hunter (Age 9)

The excitement when Hunter says it is palpable, he believes that when children see all the toys spilling out onto the floor they will exclaim "TOYS, TOYS!" He thinks other children coming into his Refuge would feel surprised by how many toys and activities there are, and that these would evoke positive feelings for children. Clearly, Hunter understood that constructing the physical environment in ways that immediately invited and captured children's interest is an essential

component of child-targeted services. Hunter's descriptions of his dream Refuge reflects that for children, ownership over their space is foundational to creating a sense of belonging and comfort.

Preoccupation with safety

Woven throughout children's narratives of having fun and being playful at Refuge was their continued preoccupation with safety. To these children, play was associated with both physical and emotional safety, and they oscillated between explicitly voiced concerns about safety and peripheral or insinuated concerns, evidenced in what they focused on in their stories. When Hunter (9), for example, was asked to draw a picture of his 'dream Refuge' his creation came to life easily. He remarked that his idea of doing a floor plan map (as seen on the previous page) was inspired by seeing a fire escape floor plan hanging in the kitchen of the safehouse he had stayed at. That this was one of his first observations of the safehouse is testament to his keen attention to potential threats to physical safety and subsequent internalisation of safety strategies.

> Interviewer   So what do you think if you were the boss of Refuge, what would
> you make sure we had for all the kids?
> **Hunter   Well, safety, toys obviously, really good rooms and well yeah
> this little entertaining kids place.**

Hunter's answer illuminates his immediate priorities. I had used expansive body language, arms thrown wide, and stressed to the children that they could use their wildest imagination and be as creative as they liked. In Hunter's 'wildest imagination', his foremost priority for Refuge was still to supply children with 'safety' above all else. As he continued to imagine his hypothetical Refuge, he alternated between this emphasis on safety and an emphasis on child-appropriate environments (such as in his description of toys, play spaces, and 'good rooms'). Hunter was so proud of his detailed map that he decided to keep his original drawing of it but allowed us to take a photo of it to use here. His drawing and reasoning for it attest to the importance of considering all aspects of the physical environment through a child's lens and recognising how these feed into children's constructions of safety.

Evan (7) was asked a similar hypothetical question and was asked to draw his ideal Refuge. While his approach differed to Hunter's, the same preoccupation with physical safety furnished his drawing. Evan's ideal Refuge was set on an island, which he named the "island of fun". The island featured many different play activities for children, but Evan took great care to circumvent any risks to children's safety amongst this play, saying "but the chainsaws are blow-up chainsaws,

and the sharks have no teeth". He thought that if he visited this island he would feel "happy and cool".
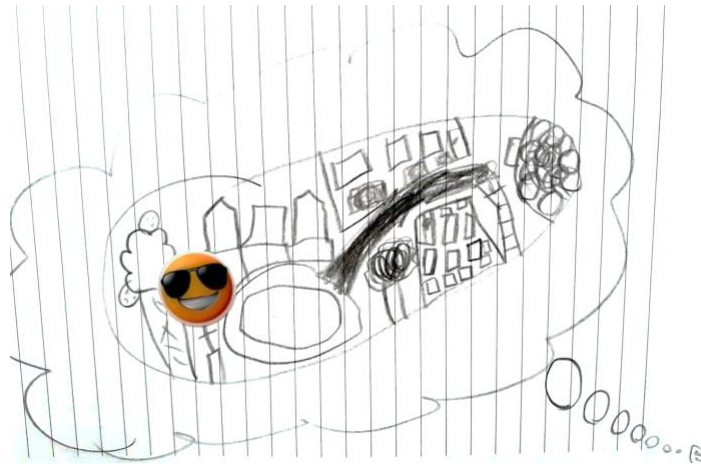
Evan (Age 7)

The services that children access are interlinked with how they experience other parts of their lives. Just as children demonstrated acute awareness of risk and safety in their imagined Refuges, they showed how their vigilance about risk and safety pervaded their everyday lives at and beyond Refuge. For example, Tai (7) suggested that cameras at his school were a good idea "so people [teachers] can see fights, and for safety". His sister Kahurangi (10) mentioned in a tangential discussion that there are certain places that you need "to be respectful" including "at the police station, and in town. Oh and [with] lawyers." Safety, for Kahurangi, extended beyond the potential for sudden physical risk, and encompassed the nuanced risk to other forms of safety posed by interactions with people who held decision-making power over their family lives. Taken collectively, these children's preoccupation with safety illustrate how their personal and family contexts influence how they understand and plan for safety.

Many of the participants have lived through (and are still living through) situations that required them to think carefully and frequently about safety, both in tangible ways (such as fire escape plans or chainsaw risks) and intangible ways (such as being respectful when interacting with people who pose risks to the security and continuity of their home lives). As highlighted in the 'before' chapter, these situations have represented a loss of their own control over and certainty within their lives. Their habitual consideration of safety and risk mitigation therefore textures their impressions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours both at Refuge and outside of Refuge. Importantly, however, this consideration of safety is bidirectional. Children perceive and are

preoccupied with possible risk in all aspects of their environments; at the same time, they draw from all aspects of their environments to create and strengthen their sense of safety.

Building comfort; building safety

Children's narratives throughout this research underlined the inextricability of 'comfort' and 'safety' to them across three domains: physical environment, relational environment, and structure of Refuge.

The first, physical environment, is an integral component of children's comfort. When Leila (13) evaluated her own experience of Refuge she said "I felt like I was in a big bubble". When invited to expand on this, she concluded that she felt "cared for", showing that for her, comfort and coping were inextricable from the ways she experienced her environment. Her metaphor of "a big bubble" symbolises what needs to be Women's Refuge's ultimate aim for how children experience Refuge services. Leila's "bubble" represents her comfort within and control over her environment, leaving her feeling peaceful and content. Her sister Isla (12) refers to a similar sense of longed-for contentment and holistic comfort when she imagines what a 'perfect place' would look like. Dreamily, she articulates her vision of an ethereal place, which captures the senses and evokes calmness, happiness, peacefulness, belonging, and restfulness for people arriving there.

> *Isla*   *The perfect place would be a place to go if you're having a bad day, to go and sit or read for a while, feeling calm and happy. [Somewhere you] can see the stars in the night time. A garden with white and yellow roses, with an assortment of lilies. A fountain made of marble. A cobblestoned path leading to the garden, trees lining the path letting in rays of sunshine and intertwining above you. You could sit on dainty seats made out of oak, the handles shaped into roses of all sorts. A small round table with a basket that has your favourite fruits.*

Much like Leila's "bubble", Isla described an enticing oasis, characterised by objects that would collectively facilitate safe and positive feelings for her. This theme of secure, peace-inducing environments that children can access to rest, think, or feel was touched upon by all of the participants.

Siblings Awhina (10) and Aaria (7) drew a dream bedroom, and decorated it with objects that would foster similar emotions for them, saying the dream bedroom would make them feel "nice

and happy". These included the "comfy bed, and blankies", the "teddy bears", and even a pet dog named in honour of their time at Refuge. Similarly, Ana (11) regarded her bed as both her favourite and most important part of Refuge. Although it had been occupied by many families before her, she labelled it as "my bed" from her very first day in the safehouse.
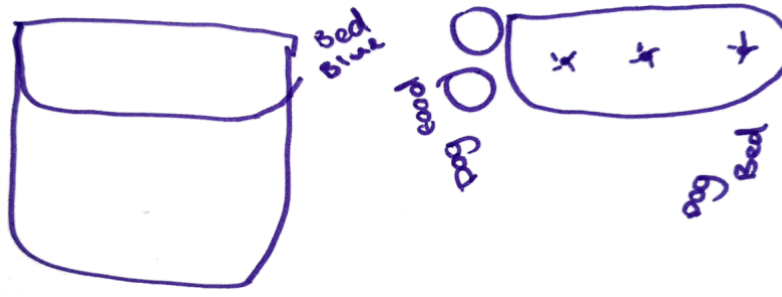
Awhina (Age 10) – with Aaria's (Age 7) suggestions

Ana felt immediate ownership over her bed and explained how it represented an individual space that she could use for respite from strong emotions, and said "[I] just go to my room if [another child] is annoying me". It was also utilised to offset the exhaustion felt from coping with the difficult and precarious context of violence that she had been exposed to before coming to Refuge.

Interviewer	What was your best day here?
Ana	**The first day I came here.**
Interviewer	How come?
Ana	**I got to sleep in my bed, I arrived.**

Ana (Age 11)

Although children were adamant that Refuge was a 'good enough' space, a few of them had extreme ideas for full renovations that involved "bulldozing the walls" and starting again, or "destroy[ing] the other [play] room to make it bigger" as appropriate and feasible options. These comments about 'destruction' related to two core ideas: the idea of comfort being physically enacted by how space is constructed, and the idea of needing a greater space to provide care for a greater number of children. The latter is discussed later in this chapter. The former, however, advances the notion that children perceive safety from physical environments that they find comfortable and comforting, both actually and symbolically. Charlotte (9), for instance, suggests that Refuges invest in "more bean bags and more places to relax", and challenges Refuge to create an indoor "fort" to symbolise the comfort children could access.

> **Charlotte**   *Like we wouldn't do the whole programme in the fort, like we would do some things in the fort and it would be huge. We would do other things at the table. Like the fort would take up all of that room beside the table and [there will be] room to pull the chairs out.*

While the precise composition of objects within the places that children felt represented 'safety' varied, children's overall sense of comfort was associated with the aggregated meanings they ascribed to their relational and spatial environments. Their perception of safety, in short, emerged out of their sense of comfort within these environments. Part of this comfort (and consequent safety) derived from the permission they had to be self-determining in constructing these environments in ways meaningful and reassuring to them.

The second domain, relational environment, showed that children responded best to adult leadership of difficult discussions and adult demonstrations of warmth and validation. Children particularly expressed their appreciation of safety-focused conversations that related to their own contexts of exposure to violence. Kauri (8), when recounting what made him feel safe, reported that toward the beginning of his children's programme, advocates asked him about violence at home and validated his responses.

> **Kauri**   *Yeah like they ask us if there has been any fights in your family.*
> *Interviewer*   *And is it good to ask that question?*
> **Kauri**   *Yeah.*
> **Mum**   *Why do you think it is good to ask that question?*
> **Kauri**   *So they know you are safe.*

Kauri found the candid discussion about previous situations of violence comforting, and recognised that advocates were asking in order to best promote his safety. He later reiterated that he liked "being asked", because it meant the onus was on adults to initiate and guide these conversations. He simultaneously felt that he was given permission to talk and that he was being taken care of. This gratitude for being explicitly asked about the violence (presumably in contrast to other environments where disclosures of violence are less welcome) was echoed by many of the participants. For Kauri, regaining a sense of 'control' was not a granting of decision-making power, but rather a gradual and implicit confidence that he could safely speak, and be supported by those listening.

> Interviewer   Why were they [staff] the best?
> **Kauri**   **And when we were sad they would be like how could we make [my brother and I] or one of these people feel happy.**

That confidence was fostered by what he could interpret from his environment: that other children spoke about their experiences, that advocates responded positively and were affirming of children, and that emotions were encouraged and validated. Kahurangi (10) gave a similar example of how having an advocate who understood and responded reliably and appropriately to what children say made a powerful difference to their feelings of comfort, reinforcing the value of advocates practising in trauma-informed and domestic violence-informed ways.

> Interviewer   Why do you think it is helpful to talk to someone?
> **Kahurangi**   **Because mostly it is because you [advocates] know about stuff [about family violence] and it helps you in life and it just keeps you good. It just makes you feel good.**

Isla (12) told us that Refuges could promote children's comfort "by being nice and warm and welcoming and including and kind and all those good things, and [advocates being] a nice person". Leila (13) raised the importance of the advocate she had known at Refuge very early on in her interview and returned to her positive appraisal of this advocate periodically. She referred to many of the advocate's activities, including buying them treats on Fridays, as building an enduring positive association with Refuge over time. Leila further emphasised how the onus for building the foundations for children's comfort is on advocates, and (quite justifiably) suggested that if adults want to know if children feel comfortable they need to "ask them… ask if they understand what is happening, [and] ask if they have any questions".

To Leila, this adult responsibility encompasses both asking, hearing, and responding to children, and she feels it is essential to reassure children that it is "okay if they feel worried, or anxious, or excited", thereby normalising and validating their emotional experiences. Accordingly, just as adults were expected to provide the scaffolding in physical settings so that children could build safety for themselves by accessing, playing with/in, and making meaning of their physical space, children needed adults to provide the means for children to exercise ownership over their own participation within relational environments.

The third domain is structure. Children referred to some of the structures within Refuges that they experienced a sense of safety from, such as those that signalled certainty, routine, and regulation. As Leila (13) and Isla (12) shared their memories of the playroom at the safehouse, they told us how they used to wake up excited in the morning, and make a beeline for the playroom or for the TV. Isla explained that doing this made her feel "normal" and gave structure to her day. Establishing this morning ritual helped their new safehouse environment to feel familiar, and afforded them a sense of belonging. Similarly, Ihaka (9) and Kauri (8) both highlighted the value they perceived from the structure that their Refuge children's programme offered. In pictures they drew of "some awesome things about Refuge" the programme room featured alongside the whiteboard of daily tasks and activities, the fluffy mat that they sat on everyday, and the model that the facilitators used with children to identify and manage their emotions. They enjoyed the predictability of the programme structure, as each session was methodical and transparent, and so represented predictability to them. This predictability extended not just to the delivery of programme content, but also to the management of behavioural responses of children in the group, and Kauri explained how pre-established methods of managing behaviour played out in his group.

> **Ihaka**   *A time out board.*
> **Kauri**   *It was a green circle, orange circle and red circle. The green circle means you are being really good, the orange circle means you are being a little bit naughty and the red circle means you need to go in a different room and talk about why you are being really naughty*

Ihaka (Age 9)

Having a planned and unambiguous structure to time, activities, and adults' responses allowed a reprieve from the hypervigilance and uncertainty that Ihaka and Kauri had described experiencing prior to Refuge. These purposeful processes help to validate, define, and manage the emotions that children experience both as a direct result of violence or in response to everyday stimuli, and help to reduce the onus on children to regulate their moods by creating a clear and modelled pathway to follow. That features of structural safety were regarded as worthy of mention and explanation by participants shows that they found them impactful and inseparable from how they conceived 'safety'.

As the two previous sections of this chapter underline, children's feelings of comfort are engendered by child-appropriate and purposeful tailoring of three domains: their physical environments, their relational environments, and the structure afforded by Refuge. Children expect (and need) adults to provide the scaffolding for each of these. They have given numerous examples of *what* in their environments they find comfort in at Refuge. The corresponding burden of responsibility for equipping the environment, preparing the people within it, and designing the structure according to what children have identified as important then lies with Refuges.

Children's feelings of comfort and security are influenced by a wide range of sources, leaving them with an intrinsic sense that is universal amongst them, even if differentially enacted. Clearly, 'safety' is not a unitary emotional state engendered by single strategies, but rather a felt

phenomenon that is transient, changeable, and derived from the range of environmental and social factors surrounding children. Their access to 'safety' is thus distributed throughout the minutiae of their everyday interactions with different spaces, people, activities, and information. Importantly, their awareness of comfort and safety and how they can and/or did attain it traversed all age ranges, showing children's proficiency in navigating their own safety when provided with sufficient opportunity and appropriate resources to do so.

Coping

Just as 'comfort' is a precondition of children's evolving safety, 'safety' is a precondition of children's developing 'coping' capacity. On a hierarchy of recovery, feeling welcome, certain, and at home within a physical, relational, and structured environment ("comfort") provides the means to progress to a felt sense of confidence, security, and power ("safety"), which then facilitates children's capacity to enact their personal and structural coping strategies. At the outset of this research project, one of our stated aims was to increase our understanding of how children "demonstrate their abilities to cope". Our projection for how this would be met focused principally on the elicitation of children's evidenced coping skills at a superficial level; in other words, a list of how they responded to frightening situations or strong feelings, who they sought support from, and what strengths were visible in their narratives of support-seeking. Discrete examples of this did emerge; some children did recall finding relief through "screaming into a pillow" when overwhelmed, doing yoga or "breathing" exercises, taking "time out", or asking for more support. However, the significance children attached to these paled in comparison to the myriad intangible ways that they depicted coping. Partway through the fourth interview, we realised that children did not need to show or prove their coping strategies to us (or other adults). Conversely, children's stories showed that adults needed to understand what coping really looks like to children, and how adults can facilitate children's access to resources that act as precursors to children's developing capacity to cope.

Conclusion

The 'setting' section explored children's descriptions of their time during Refuge. A key finding was children's preoccupation with safety, as it continued to permeate their settings, regardless of the perceived security and sense of relief that Refuge provided them. Children described the importance of play in their quest for safety, comfort, and coping. Rather than viewing children's coping as a standalone arena of child development that can be externally endowed or taught, this chapter has illustrated how certain precursors are instrumentalised by children to locate and then

build their own comfort, safety, and ultimately coping. These precursors are separated into three domains: the first is physical environment, in the form of free play in well-constructed, purposeful spaces. The second is the relational environment, in the form of responsive and comfortable relational settings, and third is structural environment, in the form of predictable, discernible rituals and structure.

DURING – SELF

Introduction

The previous section discussed the importance of the environment (physical, relational, and structural) in facilitating safety, comfort, and coping for children. This section continues to explore children's understanding of safety; children discussed aspects of the 'self' experience of Refuge that influenced their overall perceptions of how their enactment of 'self' evolved in response to the Refuge environment. We focus on three of these here; namely, children's continued worry about the future, the way children experienced and desired a personal sense of ownership over place and progress while at Refuge, and how children were able to embed their Refuge learning. Children identify gaps in their overall support, interwoven with their positive experiences and creative ideas for hypothetical future Refuges. These are given context through researcher reflections of the interviews. Throughout the 'self' section, children's understanding of 'self' is manifest both in their memories and in their future-oriented fantasies – their perceptions of the support they themselves received is evidenced in what they imagine being in place for others.

Positive regard for Refuge

Children spoke highly of their time at Refuge and gave overall positive portrayals of their experiences at Refuge within their stories and drawings. They explained what this meant to them in different ways; Aaria (7), for example, spoke about how happy she was to be at Refuge. She sat down in the lounge with both her hands clasped around a tall glass of water that rattled with six huge ice cubes, and stated that she was "really, really happy because I got a new home". Kaia (10) busied herself in the Refuge playroom and drew an emoji to convey her feelings, stopping periodically throughout to tell stories of the evening before when some of the Mums and kids sat down to watch TV together. She explains her drawing depicting her time at Refuge:

Interviewer	*So you drew the heart eyes emoji?*
Kaia	**Yeah.**
Interviewer	*How come you drew that one?*
Kaia	**Because he likes it here [at Refuge], he [the character in her picture] likes people and because he's an emoji. I love it here.**

I ♥ it here

Kaia (Age 10)

Similarly, Ihaka (9) and Kauri (8) were asked about the advice they would share with other children about their Refuge experience. Ihaka would tell other kids that "it's fun, it's amazing and it's cool too". While Kauri touches on how he experienced the relationships he made at Refuge, stating that "It's cool and when you get to know everybody, they are really cool and really friendly". Kauri also adds that the most significant help he received from Refuge was "that it encouraged us". Children's stories about their contact with Refuge services seemed to indicate that they felt it was an overall worthwhile experience. However, between these stories were indicators of gaps, and areas where services did not entirely meet their needs or cater to their understanding of 'self' as it related to the continuity of their experiences of family violence support.

Worry about the future

In the 'before' chapter children narrated stories of worry, culminating from uncertainty about where they were going, what would happen while at Refuge, and who they would encounter. Just as in the 'before' chapter, children's worry about what would happen for themselves and their families once they left Refuge continued to pervade their experiences while they were staying in a safehouse or participating in a Refuge children's programme. Worry persisted even when they were playing, feeling happy, and enjoying their time at Refuge. Their articulation of worry indicates that if their situations at Refuge are (or feel) temporary, concerns or anticipation about their futures must be explicitly addressed and discussed with them. Isla (12) captures this feeling by writing "you have not arrived at your destination" when reflecting on her time during Refuge. While these

concerns appear less pressing in the 'during' phase of children's Refuge experiences, they nevertheless remain a preoccupation.

When Leila (13) and Isla (12) were contemplating how 'George' (their fictional character) might feel at Refuge, Isla suggested that George's nervous feeling might be because he was "thinking about what is going to happen next". Awhina (10) attributed a similar anxiety to her fictional character, envisioning that they would feel "not so nervous" when they were in Refuge. Of import is the lingering nervousness she alludes to, and how she related this to her own situation. Awhina (10) and her sister Aaria (7) were staying in a safehouse at the time of their interviews and confided that they enjoyed it because all the "girls [their Mum and them] got to be together" and "there is no fighting". As the conversation progressed, it was apparent that they were apprehensive of further changes to the status quo. These concerns are captured in Awhina's poem:

> *"I worry about my family*
> *I cry when someone leaves*
> *When I'm angry I go play*
> *I am happy when I go to my Nan's house"*

Thinking about children's conceptualisation of 'what happens next' is consequently a vital aspect of validating and working with children's feelings and understanding their anxieties, and hopes for the 'self' within their social contexts.

Ownership and identity

Throughout the interviews it was apparent that the children felt ownership over Refuge spaces and Refuge activities, which gave them a sense of personal power and development of self in the Refuge context. As demonstrated above through the children's associations with particular parts of their surroundings, forming this sense of ownership is a core component of safety, comfort, and coping. This was also manifest in the ways that they used their environment to signify pride and personalisation, especially when this related to the development of self. Many of the interviews were conducted in Refuge spaces that were familiar to children, aiding in the continuity of their service experience with Refuge. Tai (8), who was very quiet and reserved to begin with, happily explained the pictures on the walls of a children's programme space. He proudly claimed his own picture and named the owners of all the art pieces that hung around his. Similarly, different children had names for the teddy bears that greeted them in the Refuge playrooms. These were mementos of their participation in the programme, as Kauri (8) states that whilst in Refuge he

would "get happy when I [would] cuddle Mr. Bear". They also represented supportive associates that accompanied children on their way to successful programme completion, Charlotte (9) confirming that "I had a favourite bear, he was proud of me".

Children articulated the role of advocates in terms of the strength of the relationships they had formed with them and what they had been able to achieve together. Children explored the way advocates catalysed their sense of identity at Refuge through the assignation of 'their' individual chair at the kitchen table, or by recounting how advocates learned the precise way they liked their sandwiches and hot drinks made. This 'claim' to Refuge and the sense of identity that it engendered appeared to counter some of the felt powerlessness they had experienced previously. Much of the individualisation of children's experiences was enabled by the approaches of advocates, who facilitated the exploration of children's individual identities, strengths, skills, and values.

Interviewer	*Do you know how Refuge helped Mum?*
Kauri	**No.**
Interviewer	*That's okay, no worries.*
Kauri	**I know how Refuge helped me.**

Kauri went on to recount how he had been 'helped', and in doing so demonstrated how his development and understanding of his own values had occurred in response to advocates' encouragement and guidance. He told us that his key learning was how important it was "to be kind"; something he had always believed in but could now apply and describe in numerous different contexts. The continuity implications of this are set out further in chapter five ('*Continuity*'). For Kauri, the strengthening of 'self' identity was inextricable from the directed learning that formed part of the children's programme curriculum; his progression throughout emphasised his growing understanding of his own self-beliefs in parallel with the acquisition of predetermined desired skills. Two other children, Kahurangi (10) and Awhina (10), similarly expressed their personal values of kindness and alluded to how their time with Refuge had solidified this and helped with their conceptualisation of how applying such values could help them in the future.

Whilst children described their individual and tailored experience as demonstrating their personal ownership of their space and interactions, they also explored in great detail how both the group facilitation and group dynamics afforded them a feeling of ownership. Their explanations of the

group culture in children's programmes depicted the group as something intimate and exclusive, unable to be replicated and representing a special, collectively constructed dynamic.

> **Ihaka**   **It is like a good place and like, [you can ask] questions, and**
> **you can do cool things.**
> **Kauri**   **And it is just between that group not anybody else**

This allusion to exclusivity and sanctity of the programme cohort is testament to the programme facilitators' abilities to promote personal and collective ownership over group culture in tandem with individual development. Kauri (8) illustrated that he understands that the programme belongs to him and the other children, and that they each have active ownership over their collective experience. This was echoed in the narratives of other programme participants, who exhibited similar authority over the functioning of the group and the activities within it. Many discussed feeling "safe" and "happy" with the group, especially in relation to the group contracts of "no hitting". Varying methods were employed by advocates to support children's growing understanding of their identity, as well as providing an experience that children felt they had ownership over.

Information overload

The comprehension and application of particular concepts also formed an integral part of the 'self' experience of being at Refuge, albeit in a less uniformly positive way. Most children linked what they regarded as their core values to the learning and practising of skills-based concepts (such as linking 'kindness' with 'consent' skills). This had dual associated findings. Children demonstrated their capacity to identify and draw upon personal skills and self-beliefs in relation to complex programme concepts. At the same time, some children expressed how the theoretical understanding and practical application of skills was constrained by insufficient time for processing.

In the 'consent' chapter, we explored how children grasped and enacted sophisticated concepts when the conditions supported their experimentation with those concepts. However, when children narrated their experiences of learning within their children's programme, the extent to which the concepts employed in programmes corresponded to time spent embedding and practising them varied. Charlotte (9) says there was "a lot of information [and] my brain can't exactly hold it for one time" and for the sake of clarification she added "there is a lot of information my brain has to manage." Plainly, programme sessions are hard work for children. They typically

involve a lot of information that is purposeful and gainful for children, but which may also be unfamiliar and challenging.

Charlotte shows her insight into the limits of her capacity to absorb and process new information and how this capacity would be strengthened through more time to entrench learning, commenting that "more time" to think about group discussions would be helpful for her. At the same time, her mother explained to us that Charlotte had conveyed a wish for "more activities" based on what was taught at each session, since Charlotte had referred to having "one activity" for each "topic of the day". Although they were asked questions about their responses to learning material, this was not always accompanied by additional learning methods that could lend greater meaning to what they were learning. Throughout children's interviews, the active, creative, and performative expressions of children's thought led us to reflect that offering multiple activities that catered for a multitude of learning styles and preferences might mitigate children's perceptions of information saturation. Varying these activities and opportunities to embed and experiment with the "topic of the day" may also foster children's continued sense of ownership over their own participation.

Children's perceptions of skills acquisition

As introduced above, children described experiencing information overload while at Refuge and expressed some uncertainty over whether they could truly enact the content covered in programmes in other situations in their lives. In our interview with Rose (7) and Elijah (5), their mother and their advocate were both present. Their advocate checked with the children and with their mother before sharing some of their backstory. She shared that the children's father is not allowed at their house, and that there is a button the children can press if he does show up (as part of Women's Refuge Whānau Protect home security programme). Rose was worried because she thought her father might try to come over, and that prospect frightened her. She offered up her version of the advocate's story:

> *Rose* *He told me that he will come over and I didn't really want that.*
> *I was freaked out. I thought that [I could try] going to my room*
> *and calling the police, or I could go stay safe next door and*
> *go to my neighbour.*

Rose was supported by Refuge to identify possible options for if her father does come to her house, including hiding in her room, calling the police, or hiding with neighbours. However, having those options available did not necessarily reduce her preoccupation with possible risk. Without

experimenting with them to see how effectively they worked or whether there would be any unanticipated barriers, the effectiveness of the safety strategies remained an unknown.

Ihaka (9) and Kauri (8) also have a safety alarm installed, which if triggered alerts the police. Both boys understood the function and purpose of the safety alarm, and enthusiastically explained it. However, Kauri (8) used his explanation of their safety plan as a dialogic springboard, proposing hypothetical solutions that would ease his recurrent worry about possible problems in enacting the safety plan.

Interviewer	*How do you feel knowing that there is a light that flashes and the alarm?*
Ihaka	**It protects us.**
Interviewer	*Protects you.*
Ihaka	**Yeah.**
Kauri	**I really want secret lasers. In the night-time you can't see [some] places, but in [the] day time you can see lasers. So, me and my Mum don't step on them. We get these goggles so we can see past them.**
Interviewer	*So you can see them through the goggles? [So] you know where to stand?*
Kauri	**Yeah.**
Interviewer	*Nice! Is there anything else that would make you feel protected and safe?*
Ihaka	**Security cameras so we can have, like a secret, and we should have a secret room like…**
Mum	*…Like a hidden room?*
Kauri	**Yeah like a hidden room behind a drawer we just need like a thing on the side [secret lever] and we just need to pull it out and it opens or there can be a secret clip and we need to pull down and it opens [gesturing to explain the process].**

While his identification of potential impediments and solutions were hypothetical and fantastical, his concern about putting the safety plan into action for the first time in the midst of a critical event was legitimate. Without physically and repeatedly practising the sequence of safety actions in the plan, Kauri spent time mentally visualising, trouble-shooting, and problem-solving each step to build his own confidence that the plan would work in an emergency situation. In sum, safety planning was generally acknowledged as a valuable component of children's experiences, but also represented an ongoing source of anxiety if there were insufficient opportunities to act out

the plans. This is further evidenced in the interviewer's reflection note after an interview with Ihaka and Kauri:

> *After the final interview with Ihaka and Kauri, I was saying my 'thank you's and 'goodbyes' when Kauri declares that he had a "genius idea". He's invented a solution to children's uncertainty about whether they will be able to carry out their safety plans in the heat of the moment. He said "you [Refuge] should make a video game, where like, you're a kid, and like Mum and dad are fighting and you have to [does a sneaking walk] get past them, [to get] to the front door or whatever, and [the game is] counting down and you have to do it". He also offered another 'game' as a way of learning how to be savvy when carrying out safety plans. This game involved one group of kids sneaking past another group of kids to steal a crystal without them noticing. At first, I am struck by the creativity and Kauri's ability to arrive at a child targeted solution. Then I feel saddened that there is still an air of uncertainty for him as he has not had a space to practice or to speak about his concerns, meaning that he wants to seek comfort and practice from a video game that simulates the different situations that he believes could happen. Finally, I was aware that he specifically mentions the fighting that has plagued his previous situations - he wants to learn how to be 'sneaky' because that is something he is unsure how to do, and he has explicitly indicated he needs practice at it.*

The prospect of something going wrong during a critical situation was frightening. Children expressed a need for more time spent acting out their safety plans to build their confidence in the plan, and to alleviate residual fear of the plan failing. At the same time, they showed that acting out a safety plan could be exciting, imaginative, and gratifying despite the sombre purpose. The need to carefully balance these factors - making safety planning both fun and reassuring - further reinforces the role of programme content and delivery in directly addressing the hidden emotional and mental burden that children carry. If not supported to do that 'work' of sorting through the possibilities that crop up for them, that mental work becomes unseen, unguided, and unguarded in its parameters.

Continuity of skills acquisition

Children were asked in several different ways about "their favourite thing at Refuge". As discussed previously their answers often centred around how Refuge made them feel, and the relationships built with other children through play. Their other favoured aspects of Refuge were skills based, such as the opportunities they had to learn about and discuss their feelings.

Ambrose (8), Jax (7), and Emma (6) all energetically nodded 'yes' knowing they are allowed to express anger when they are in Refuge. However, from the way they spoke about their favourite aspects of Refuge, it seemed as if the transference of theoretical learning into practice was something children had limited confidence in. Again, as above, this may be related to having only variable opportunity to practice it. Having time to practice and space to allow for repetition is important, as Ambrose describes his attempts to apply his learning in a space that may not be set up to accommodate and encourage his use of new concepts.

Interviewer	*We want to know what is the best thing for kids about coming here?*
Ambrose	**Learning.**
Interviewer	*You like learning, what did you learn when you were here?*
Ambrose	**Learning about trying to keep calm.**
Interviewer	*So when might you have to keep calm?*
Ambrose	**When sometimes you get angry.**
Interviewer	*Yeah definitely, and how did you do that learning?*
Ambrose	**By breathing in and breathing out.**
Interviewer	*Nice, does that help?*
Ambrose	**Yes.**
Interviewer	*Have you tried that before when you've been angry?*
Ambrose	**Once.**
Interviewer	*And did it work?*
Ambrose	**Kind of.**

Ambrose hesitated when he said that he had applied his learning outside of the Refuge context only "once"; this may indicate that he felt shame at not having been successful in his practice, or that he was uncertain about how he was supposed to practice. It appears that Ambrose, and other children, might need more time to practice these difficult concepts, as well as having exposure to positive reinforcement for demonstrating this practical application of their learning. For Ambrose, the continuity of learning seems to be missing when he is outside of the Refuge context. Ambrose may not have been fully supported by Refuge to fulfil the enactment of his emotional management in environments that differ from Refuge.

Kahurangi (10) and her brother Tai (8) explain the expectations they have for their own emotional expression at Refuge. Kahurangi's comfort is portrayed as she wistfully states that "the best thing [about being at Refuge] is the feelings: scared, peaceful, respectful". She continues "it's peaceful, you can talk about everything, talk about how you are in the morning, I feel confident, it feels like family". Kahurangi indicates an overall sense of contentment about her learning and ability to

express herself within Refuge. Whereas Tai (8) experienced the value of discussing his feelings differently than his sister did. His experience of being in Refuge remained tinged with the sadness that he feels about his situation prior to Refuge. When asked if the discussions he has had about his Dad have made him feel any better, he firmly says "not for me...I still feel sad", although he acknowledges that whilst at Refuge "you are allowed to feel any kind of emotion". Building a strong base of emotional expression is positive, provided children feel that at the conclusion of their Refuge contact they have discussed things of importance to them to an extent they feel confident with.

Kahurangi and Tai discussed that if someone has a sad feeling at Refuge then they can "say to everyone I'm sad and they [staff and other children] help you". If children's expectations about emotional expression are not met this could create unsafe experiences for them. Similarly, Rose (7) confidently recites all the feelings that she has spoken about since being at Refuge "happy feelings, fun feelings, amazing feelings, cool feelings, sad feelings and unhappy feelings". It would be preferable that when children utilise their extensive range of emotional expression outside the bounds of Refuge that they are met with validating and affirming responses. Later I reflected on children's stories from these three family groups:

After witnessing the interactions between children and their mothers, it seemed that the interview experience was overall a positive one for whānau. Often it was the first-time children had spoken in detail to anyone about their time at Refuge, and for some, the only dedicated time that Mums had to learn about what children enjoyed and what they struggled with. It was great to witness the questions that went back and forth between Mums and their kids as they explored each other's experiences. I marvelled at children's ability to describe what they had learnt, and was wrapped up in hearing about their positive experiences. This momentarily felt great, until I considered that the translation of learning from Refuge to home may not be prioritised by Refuge, especially if staff are on the lookout for tangible signs or evidence of learning, as demonstrated only within the 'safety' of the Refuge context. I wondered how consistently children are equipped to and how appropriate it is for them to practice emotional expression within the context of 'home'? I felt ashamed that this lack of incorporation of Mums into their children's learning creates more work for children and whānau on top of their already considerable 'workloads'. This also makes the ongoing nature of their learning more complex than necessary. Refuge may look at ways of supporting Mums' inclusion into their children's learning. This may facilitate continued learning outside the physical bounds of Refuge.

As the reflection note suggests, the obvious source of extended reinforcement for children's learning beyond the Refuge context – children's mothers – do not appear to be drawn into children's skills acquisition as part of children's programmes. The discussion between Charlotte and her mother is suggestive of the potential benefits of incorporating Mums and children into each other's learning and development within Refuge. As Charlotte's Mum listened to Charlottes in-depth stories, she mused over the similarities between their experiences and just how comparable some of their struggles have been. In doing so she validated Charlotte's experiences, creating further connection with her daughter.

> *Interviewer*   *So what is good about meeting people that you know have had similar experiences to you?*
> *Charlotte*   ***It means you can talk to them and they would understand like they would understand what you are going through.***
> *Mum*   *It's the same with adults too really.*

In the 'after' chapter, we further explore children's 'work' within these programmes and the sense of achievement they feel (and want validated) when they finish. Their desire for recognition for their progress is also relevant here - if children's mothers are not supported to be part of their children's programme learning, they are less likely to witness the ways children invest in and work hard at their programmes, and to be able to celebrate them accordingly.

Conclusion

This 'self' section has explored children's thoughts, feelings, and overall impressions of their contact with Refuge services. Whether children accessed a safehouse or children's programme, their Refuge experience was pervaded by worry about the perceived temporary nature of their time with Refuge. They indicated that they did not always understand exactly what would happen next or how they might continue to access support. While they were proficient and drawing from and weaving together multiple sources of information, their comprehension about the implications of that information for themselves and their families was constrained by that piecemeal compilation. Without purposeful and age-appropriate information, their uncertainty persisted. This will be discussed in greater detail in the 'after' section, which explores children's ideas for how the continuity of service provision may help to alleviate and validate these feelings.

Children discussed their appreciation for the individualised support they received at Refuge, which allowed them to feel ownership over their spaces. Their sense of identity appeared to be enhanced by their feelings of connection to and ownership over their own work. As gratifying as

this learning was for children, and as proud as they were of their achievements at Refuge, they identified that it is still 'work' for them. They felt overloaded with information, and wished for more opportunity for processing, practicing, and embedding learning to increase its applicability outside of the Refuge context. These feelings were compounded by a perceived lack of adult understanding of this mental workload, which may be countered by incorporating children's safe and proximal parents into the design of children's learning to support the continuity of their progress.

DURING – OTHER

Introduction

The previous section focused on children's experiences of the 'self' during their contact with Refuge services. Children revealed their preoccupation with safety and risk, and described the importance of connection to and ownership over Refuge spaces. While the previous section depicted gaps that children identified in their experiences as they related to the 'self', this section draws into focus the significant positive role that key characters play in children's experiences and how they, in turn, conceptualise others. Imagined 'other' children featured prominently in the majority of stories that children told and the experiences they relayed. These imagined 'other' children were discussed in relation to both their relational significance and children's perceived need for Refuge services to evolve and expand. Finally, they illustrated the centricity of 'Mum' to their 'during' experiences, indicating how the facilitated inclusion of a safe parent in support work with children can enhance children's experiences of support.

Children

A key theme from children's stories of their experiences with Refuge was their desire for other children who have had (or will have) contact with Refuge to have the same overall positive experience that they had. This emerged as they spoke about how they felt cared for, comforted, and important while at Refuge, and what resources (material as well as interpersonal) resources facilitated this for them. Their discussions about these also highlighted their own capacity for insight: children were so insightful about their own experiences that they were easily able to place themselves in the shoes of a hypothetical future child who might experience Refuge for the first time, and make suggestions about how to equip Refuge to do the best for that child.

Hunter (9), for example, imagined Refuge becoming a safe haven for children, complete with endless quality entertainment. In his interview, Hunter was on a roll; the improvements he envisioned for Refuge were flooding to mind. Without prompting he made a statement that showed how he was thinking deeply about what he could offer to *all* of the children who may experience his 'dream Refuge' in the future. He paused, his eyes smiling, as he said: "'you know, if I was rich, I would make this place [his dream Refuge], and then guess what I would do is I would get every single kids' movie in the world, and then just bring it here'. The enormity of gathering 'every single kids' movie in the world' speaks to the importance he placed on how other children experience comfort while at Refuge. He went on to further explain this 'dream Refuge',

choosing to adorn its playroom with arcade games because he thought that other children will enjoy them, saying "all the kids I know love them". Hunter was not alone in his consideration of the possible 'other' future clients of Refuge. Although he spoke happily about his family arrangements, his school, friends, and hobbies, Hunter's situation was not free from the impacts of violence. Regardless of this, he imagined other children's contexts as much worse than his, offering up a selfless narrative of the need to prepare Refuge for "all the other kids".

The other children, like Hunter, continually returned to a 'for the other kids' discussion, throughout which their consideration of other children's feelings was of utmost concern. It was important for them that other children felt "happy" and "relaxed" at Refuge. Kauri (8), who had completed a children's programme, explained where he thought Refuge's focus should now lie. He gallantly stated that "it isn't about me and my brother, it is about the other kids". This theme was continually surprising; the ease with which children put the spotlight on the countless others reflected their boundless capacity for compassion and their perception of the 'need' that plagues other children's lives. The relationships between children were considered as important as the physical environment, with Kaia (10) and Ana (11) advocating for living with "50 other kids" so that both their own and others' experience "is more fun".

Sitting in the playroom of their Refuge at 7pm, we had to shut the playroom door and put a blanket up over the frosted glass to avoid being interrupted by the other kids in the safehouse. Although this was evidently a bit frustrating for Kaia and Ana, they still spoke of the benefits of the other children's presence, especially after school in the "more boring times". Overall, they were grateful for the company and suggested that having more children would be beneficial to them, as getting to "meet new people" was something they both enjoyed.

When thinking about which objects they would like to have in a safehouse or programme, most of the children named those that could be shared or could involve multiple children simultaneously. Much of this was about scale/size and reach - they envisioned 'big', 'more', or 'many' when thinking about resources, material objects, and potential services. The predominant feeling that children wanted others to experience was, once again, happiness. Aaria (7) and Tai (8) were the youngest of their sibling groups, and although they had relied on their older, more articulate siblings to do the majority of the initial speaking, they both offered suggestions about Refuge could be improved to support others. Aaria jumped off the couch she was sitting on to mimic the grandeur of her giant swing, exclaiming:

> *Aaria*   **A big, big swing!!**
> *Interviewer*   *What would the big swing do?*
> *Aaria*   **Just stay here until there are plenty of persons, one million**
> **[can] go on.**

Tai (8) was chattier in his second interview. He had spent some time with his sister in between interviews thinking about what he wanted to communicate. One of his big ideas was about inclusion, and had one very important purpose:

> *Interviewer*   *So one of my big questions for you guys is if you were the boss of*
> *this place what would you buy for every single kid who came here?*
> *What would you buy Tai?*
> *Tai*   **I would buy a big water slide.**
> *Interviewer*   *A big water slide?*
> *Tai*   **Yeah.**
> *Interviewer*   *That is such a cool idea, why would you buy a big water slide?*
> *Tai*   **So everybody can be happy.**

There were numerous other examples of scale/size, and reach; including recommending a "gigantic bouncy castle" (Evan, 7), a "big couch" (Awhina, 10) and "more bikes" (Kaia, 10; Aaria, 7). Even in his drawing, Hunter (9) sketched additional children into his depiction of play, emphasising children's inherent grasp of mutuality and shared experience of childhood.

> *Interviewer*   *And what is going to happen outside what do we need outside?*
> *Hunter*   **A swing set, actually I will draw like that [draws on the page]**
> **and lines here, small lines, and… I am going to draw someone**
> **on it. I am going to draw two people on it.**

In addition to their shared desire for other children to feel happiness, their suggestions illustrate children's perceptions of need. They believe there is a great and unmet need for children. They want to extend their own access to resources offered by Refuge to all of these children. This was further explored in the interviewer's reflection:

> *When I first started interviewing, I felt relief that the children were able to answer some*
> *of my questions, although in hindsight I had immediately deemed their responses to*
> *be obvious and simplistic. Initially, I did not fully realise the importance of their ideas*
> *around Refuge improvements, as I only heard their want for 'objects' or 'toys' when*
> *they spoke about 'more and bigger'. Taking time to analyse my own comprehension I*
> *began to piece together the picture that the kids were painting for me. I realised that*
> *this is the exact issue that presents throughout this research – not taking seriously or*

giving enough weight to the things that kids are literally telling us. The themes of sharing and putting first those who are 'in need' shone through. The children's selflessness and their want to build relationships, connect and have shared experiences, was the true meaning of the answers they were giving me. Far from obvious and simplistic, their ideas speak volumes about who and what they value. This led me to ponder how they can be so selfless, and so considerate of the needs of others, when they are themselves are receiving Refuge support. Through more discussion it became apparent that they felt there were so many more children and families to help. They had grand plans to create a service that was not only equipped with toys and activities for children, but was also equipped to understand what opening its doors wholly to children really means. Essentially, they were telling me that I need to start to recognise what children need and how children perceive the needs of other children before I could start to comprehend a service fit for children or a space that enables more children to experience safety.

In sum, from the point of view of children, there are simply many more children to help, and they believe Refuge needs more people, more resources and play items, and a greater space in which to help them. Charlotte (9), Ihaka (9), and Kauri (8) exemplify this in their discussion.

Charlotte	***There are more kids who need help every day, there are kids that need help!***
Interviewer	*So if you were the boss here what would be the first things you bought if you had to buy anything?*
Charlotte	***I would renovate this place to make it bigger so then they could get more people to help people in need.***
Interviewer	*That is a really beautiful answer.*
Charlotte	***And we might even be able to get multiple children programmes running at once if we made it bigger and that would help a lot of kids. More kids and human beings in the world.***

The idea of multiple programmes offering greater access for children was something that Charlotte was committed to. She reiterated her stance in her second interview, saying "I would make it [Refuge] bigger so they could fit more staff in, so they could make more programmes and things". Ihaka and Kauri echo this specific sentiment around the importance of 'fitting everyone'.

Ihaka	*There should actually be another room for more kids.*
Interviewer	*Another room for more kids?*
Ihaka	*Yeah so there's kids in the second room.*
Kauri	*Or they can just make the room bigger, to fit more.*
Both	*Yeah.*

These descriptions conjure up images of the current setting being cramped, unfit for the level of need, but altogether a space with untapped potential. Their recommendations of increasing scale/size and reach encompassed human resources. They felt that Refuge might need to get more people (staff) so that more 'people in need' could be helped. Finally, their 'end goal' for helping more is acutely straightforward. They want other children to feel safe - just like they felt while at Refuge. This message is heard loud and clear from Ihaka, whose specificity leaves no room for doubt.

Interviewer	*Why do you think we need to have more kids?*
Ihaka	*So more kids feel safer.*
Interviewer	*More kids feel safer?*
Ihaka	*Instead of unsafe.*

Mum

Because Mums were often present throughout the interviews, there were dual data sources - children's narratives featuring Mum, and the interviewer's own observations of the interactions between the children, Mum, and the interviewer. As mentioned in other chapters, both sets of data indicated strongly that Mum was uniformly a character in children's stories that represented love, trust, safety, and consistency.

Hunter (9) has an exciting memory that he shared with just his Mum while his younger brother was asleep. His enjoyment at re-telling the story was evidenced in his wildly flailing arms, and his speedy verbal pace; he seemed thrilled that he could relay this special moment and included his Mum in the re-telling so she could enjoy it too. Similarly, Awhina's (10) and Aaria's (7) Mum was present in the interviews and often participated through verbal prompts to her children to encourage them. Her presence appeared to increase their comfort and they were open and forthcoming. This was often illustrated as much through seemingly unrelated anecdotes and chatting as through more purposeful discussion. Below we see Awhina's unprompted recognition of their Mum's strengths:

Interviewer	*How good are you guys at sharing?*
Aaria	**Not that much.**
Mum	*They are working on it.*
Interviewer	*That is a nice way to say that [all laugh]*
Awhina	**My Mum shares with her friends.**
Interviewer	*That's good. Do you share with your friends?*
Aaria	**Just a little bit.**

Their incidental descriptions of Mum generally painted a picture of a responsive but firm parent. In the time between the first and second interviews, Awhina and Aaria had done many drawings together. While flicking through Awhina's drawing book, some of her sketches caught the interviewer's eye. One full page was dedicated to each of her family members that were staying at the safehouse. Their names were written in the middle of each page and brightly coloured in, and surrounding these names were various adjectives to describe each individual. Awhina spoke first about her sister's choice of adjectives:

Awhina	**Her ones are cool, awesome, mean, dramatic, stink, funny, loud and fun.**
Interviewer	*What words did you use for Mum?*
Awhina	**Cool, fun, funny, smart, a little bit mean.**
Mum	*Just a little bit.*
Interviewer	*Mums have to be a little bit mean!*
Mum	*Can't be cool all the time.*

Mum was laughing and so were the children, who seemed comfortable assigning both positive and negative terms to Mum without fear of repercussions. Meanwhile, Mum casually acknowledged the truth of her parenting role (that 'Mums can't be cool all the time'). This interaction further signals possible benefits for a crossover between kids' and mothers' support in the aftermath of violence, and shows how easily that mother-children interplay can be welcomed into children's support journeys when initiated safely and purposefully.

Conclusion

In this section, children's concern for other children is patently obvious. They feel that many children need help, that both physical space and material objects are instrumental in making these other children feel comfortable, and that future children would be best supported by more advocates and a scaling up of Refuge resources. They were intent on ensuring these future children felt safe and happy. Children spoke openly about the relationships of importance to them

while at Refuge, and their interactions with their mothers underscored how pivotal the 'Mum' character can be in shaping children's experiences of support.

CONCLUDING THE 'DURING'

Children arrive at Refuge in the immediate aftermath of stress, change, and disruption to their family setting. As they settle in, they look to their physical setting, to the kids around them, and to the adults who play either constant or temporary roles in their lives to find and create ways of coping. Each of these is paramount to their capacity to cope, yet potentially limited by the adult-focused design of services. The 'during' of their experiences, or the time they are actively engaged in Refuge services, is simultaneously positive and contradictory. Their stories highlight how in this phase, they feel *both* worried *and* comforted, are absorbed in *both* work *and* play (sometimes in tandem), and intuit *both* risk *and* safety. However, they are acutely aware that their time at Refuge is inherently temporary.

At the same time, children feel concern and compassion for real and imagined others. Notions of other children having the same or greater need for safety as their own colour their retrospective appraisals of their own experiences. Their imaginings of the best possible support for others is imbued with the positive aspects of their own recollections of Refuge: the ownership and autonomy they exercised over their physical space, the significance they assigned to objects generative of comfort and play, the genuine connections they formed with others, and the facilitated opportunities for their learning and skills acquisition.

Equally, these imaginings offered insight into the ways these personal benefits that children derived from being at Refuge were constrained by a lack of continuity. What they wanted for other children was permanence. They wanted them to experience certainty about future safety, transferability and applicability of theoretical learning, and a weaving together of the 'present' support and their 'future' contexts. This then leads us to children's 'after' – their stories of leaving Refuge or looking ahead to their futures beyond the Refuge context.

Chapter Four: After Refuge

Kia ora kids! We were really keen to hear from you about how leaving Refuge felt and what life was like after you left. You told us to keep helping your Mums. All your ideas and stories will help things for children, but we will never take our focus off your Mums, and all the other Mums out there.

You often called the things you did at Refuge 'work'. We now see how much energy you put into meeting new people, learning new things, and making sense of things when there was so much change going on. Although you had lots of fun times, Refuge can almost be like a job for you. You worked hard on your friendships and maybe the biggest thing on your mind was how hard it was to leave the friends that you made behind.

You told us you were proud but sad at the same time. Sometimes adults might not understand how special and important your new 'best friends' can be in your life. You let us know that your Refuge friends were by your side through big life moments. We then understood how much you missed them and the loss you felt when you were no longer able to see them. You had great ideas for how we need to think about you after you finish with us and what that should look like for you.

OVERVIEW OF AFTER

The feelings that characterised children's exits from Refuge were variably identical to and the antithesis of those characterising their arrivals. They experienced immense gains at Refuge. They also experienced a second upheaval, a second leap into an unknown future, and a second separation from people who had been instrumental to their sense of connectedness, identity, and learning. Children's narratives of 'after' encompassed their anticipation of and preparation for their exit from a safehouse or programme, their rituals of 'finishing' and saying goodbye, and their outlook to their futures.

Many of the themes discernible in their stories of this temporal phase mirrored those from their 'before'. They remained dependent on and affected by the decision-making of adults. Their social contexts and accordant perceptions of their own safety and stability were shaped by the protective parenting of their mothers, and by the unpredictable future risk associated with the behaviours of their fathers.

As in other temporal phases, the intensity of their emotional and cognitive experiences were manifest in child-appropriate narratives, which were potentially underestimated by others. However, their 'after' stories also demonstrated the depth of their feelings of loss and grief, in conjunction with their feelings of pride and success. Finally, they illustrated the ways that children navigated these conflicting, confusing, and often bittersweet emotions.

AFTER – SETTING

Introduction

In this final 'setting' section, children offered suggestions about how they could best be supported – directly or indirectly – as their involvement with Refuge came to a close. They explained how they understand their capacity to access support and resources in relation to their safe, proximal parents, and the implications of this access for ongoing safety and stability. Captured in this section is children's obvious vulnerability as child victims of family violence in need of ongoing support.

Adults' decision-making

Children had a straightforward understanding of their immediate contexts: adults needed to think about children, because adults were in charge of making decisions for children and taking care of them. Children's powerlessness over their situations (relative to adults) was underlined in chapter two ('*Before*'). That chapter signalled how this could give rise to social precarity and uncertainty in the aftermath of violence if services are not constructed in ways that are responsive to children's experiences. However, children also understood their dependence on adults as a primary source of safety, and knew that resourcing and supporting adults in their lives enabled those adults to keep them safe and make decisions that would benefit them. This is exemplified in Kauri's (8) explanation of where imaginary resources should go:

> Interviewer How many more kids do you think we need to help?
> **Ihaka** **Heaps.**
> **Kauri** **And heaps more adults.**
> Interviewer We have to help heaps more adults too, how come?
> **Kauri** **Because the adults are the ones who need the money to look**
> **after the kids.**

Kauri recognised that adults need support so they can look after children. The immediacy of his responses seemed to indicate how obvious this was to him. His responses also reinforced that children rely on the *permanence* of their Mums' support, and as such, his suggestion that Mums have ongoing support implies the natural benefit this would have on guaranteeing his own enduring support and access to resourcing. Children were aware of the enmeshment of their own and their mothers' roles, further reinforcing the need for the people supporting them to prioritise partnering with their mothers to give appropriate information about what will happen next for children. Similarly, another sibling group consisting of two brothers and their sister (Ambrose,

Emma, and Jax, aged 8, 6 and 7) showed their understanding of how Refuge support shaped their immediate social context after they have completed their programme, even though this support is principally oriented at supporting Mum.

Interviewer	*Can you tell me what helped you the most about coming to this place [Refuge], what is the most helpful thing?*
Ambrose	**They bought us a house.**
Interviewer	*They bought you a house, cool.*
Emma	**They give us food parcels.**
Interviewer	*They give you food parcels, that is so good. What is your most helpful thing Jax?*
Jax	**They kind of give us some money.**
Interviewer	*Give you some money and a house and food that is important.*

Although the above conversation is very much a child's interpretation of the support provided to the mother (i.e. it is unlikely Refuge bought them a house) their perception is that Mum needed basic essentials to provide these for the children, and Refuge helped Mum to access these alongside more safety-specific support. In sum, children implicitly understood that supporting and resourcing their mothers benefits them, because the more that Mum has to draw upon, the more she can offer the children.

How adults consider the autonomy of children as they are making decisions that impact them, however, is also important to counter children's felt powerlessness. Hunter (9) showcased this in his idealised vision of total ownership over shaping his physical setting. Hunter's enjoyment of the research was principally because it meant having more contact with Refuge in ways that were purposefully targeted toward *his* comfort and sense of safety. Our interviews with him took place almost two years after he stayed in a Refuge safehouse with his Mum and younger brother. He was enthusiastic about being involved and articulate about his wishes. He told the interviewer all about the 'dream Refuge' that he created: "If I was a kid and this Refuge was absolutely a thing, and me and Mum and [brother] went there instead of that other Refuge [safehouse] I would actually feel quite happy. I would love this place because, well, I thought of it, and if it was actually a thing, [then] I would love that." Clearly, Hunter valued the chance to have input into and ownership of his own surroundings and social context. Supporting this autonomy over the child's setting *within* the contexts shaped by adults' decisions can give effect to their self-determination as they navigate continued transitions in and beyond Refuge.

Conclusion

In this findings chapter and the two preceding it, the 'settings' section introduces the contexts of children at each temporal phase. This chapter brings the child's setting full circle – as with chapter two ('*Before'*), their setting is defined in relation to adults' decisions-making and the consequent safety and autonomy that these represent for children. Plainly, clients who are children need adults to make protective decisions, and need their mothers to be supported so that they can support their children.

AFTER – SELF

Introduction

The 'self' section in this chapter focuses on children's descriptions of what accessing Refuge meant for who they were, what they felt, and what lay ahead for them in their lives. Children displayed immense pride in having gone through the 'hard work' involved in a children's programme or in their exit of a Refuge because it meant the transitional stage had been completed. They wanted their achievements to be acknowledged and celebrated by others. At the same time, they felt a sense of loss. 'Finishing' signified more than simply achievement; it heralded the loss of the connections that they made, the conclusion of their direct support from Refuge, and the ending of a dynamic they had found immense satisfaction in.

Equivalence of emotion and personal investment

Children's programmes are generally designed to be enjoyable to children. However, as the participants suggested throughout their interviews, these can be simultaneously enjoyable *and* immensely challenging, emotional, and mentally tiring. After several children alluded to this complex mental load in parallel with their positive reflections about the 'playing' involved, we reflected that this represents yet another possible minimisation of the child experience. If their mothers attended the women's programme at the same time, for instance, it would be generally accepted that they were embarking on significant mental and emotional work, often catalysed by several inter-related life-changing events or processes that are all acknowledged as major life stressors.

Children's memories of their participation in programmes or attendance at safehouses were imbued with those same preoccupations and a parallel process of growth and change. They referred to the 'hard work' involved in meeting new people, making friends and navigating new rules (both explicit and implicit), learning, growing, feeling strong emotions and managing them, talking about hard topics, dealing with fear, accepting and giving comfort, making sense of their current and past situations, developing new coping mechanisms, creating or negotiating the use of new spaces, preparing for additional new experiences, and challenging their own behaviour. Yet the equivalence of their 'hard work' in parallel to their mothers' 'hard work' may not always be explicitly recognised, particularly in the context of their exit from Refuge. Children in safehouses who have not also accessed a children's programme referred to a lack of reward or

acknowledgement of what work they have done or what growth they have achieved. Ihaka (9) and Kauri (8) explained how this is different from the completion of a children's programme:

> **Ihaka**   **At the end of the [programme] they can like some can go to [activity] and do fun things with them.**
> Interviewer   Like a big activity.
> **Kauri**   **Yeah a big activity, for like all the work they have done.**
> Interviewer   So do you do a lot of work when you are there?
> **Both**   **Yeah.**
> **Kauri**   **Sometimes it is tiring.**

In the previous 'during' chapter, children discussed their feelings relating to their individual workloads, and the weight they felt at having the responsibility of embedding and practicing safety skills. In this section, children reiterate this, emphasising their cognisance of the effort that is involved for them to participate. Charlotte, for instance, after being asked what would help her keep the feeling (which she had described as feeling like she could fly in space) responded "knowing that I have completed [the Refuge programme]". Similarly, other children focused on an extension to children's programmes that enabled greater celebration of everything they had learned and achieved. They considered that some form of recognition or reward for this hard work (especially if their families were part of the ritual of this recognition) would make it gratifying and strengthen their sense of achievement. This is also echoed in children's desire to 'guest star' in subsequent children's programmes; it represented both a way of helping other children and a way of demonstrating growth and graduation from the 'present' phase of their participation.

The importance of recognition for children's investment was shown in the frequent discussion of cake. Every child who had attended a children's programme highlighted the salience of 'cake' as part of their journeys. Although this could be superficially interpreted as a naturally appealing prospect for children, their explanations of it demonstrated the significance that it represented to them. The ritual of having cake, which for them was heavily associated with a sense of celebration, was an important part of their feelings of completion, success, growth, pride, and closure. It constituted an important ritual of both celebration and transition; children had successfully completed the programme and were about to leave their programme peers and embark on another life phase. The emotions that stand out most starkly in their memories are testament to the gains they have experienced - feelings of pride, happiness, safety, and confidence were threaded throughout their descriptions of ending their time at Refuge, as shown below. In the first example, the siblings are imagining their character is about to leave Refuge.

Interviewer	How do we want George to feel when he leaves Refuge.
Isla	**Safe and happy.**
Leila	**Amazing.**
Interviewer	Safe and happy.
Leila	**Like if he was a caterpillar and he went into the metamorphosis and he emerged a butterfly.**
Interviewer	Beautiful, that is what we want him to feel.
Leila	**Or like crawling out from under your blankets, fresh air on your face.**

In the second example, Charlotte (9) is explaining what differs between her 'before' drawing and her 'after' drawing, and touches on what had changed for her as a result of her Refuge experience.

Interviewer	And what is the difference between the two?
Charlotte	**I don't have a derpy looking face. I'm not wondering what the hell is going on and I have wings. I have wings.**
Interviewer	What do those wings mean for you afterwards?
Charlotte	**It is peaceful and I can fly to space.**

These endings were complicated by simultaneous loss and sadness. One of the primary and most common emotions that children alluded upon leaving Refuge or completing a children's programme was grief - to them, 'ending' represented a loss of a personal resource that had supported their sense of belonging and safety. Kauri (8) emphasises this by pointing out that once children had become settled at Refuge, they would be sad when it is time to leave. Similarly, Kahurangi (10) said finishing the programme "was so sad" because it meant leaving the friendships she had cultivated throughout the programme. Attending the children's programme had given Kahurangi a sense of reciprocity in these friendships - she learned from the other children and felt able to help other children learn as well. Isla (12) also told us she felt very sad leaving, because she had been comfortable at Refuge and had embraced the predictable routine that it offered.

| Interviewer | How do you think the kids will feel when they leave this place [Refuge]? |
| **Hunter** | **Happy that they've been there and probably sad that they are leaving** |

Conclusion

As so beautifully highlighted by Leila's reference to a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly, or the sense of leaving confidently with 'fresh air on your face", children found profound gratification

from their experiences of participating in and completing programmes. It was important to them that they could take part in rituals that acknowledged their achievements, and they were proud of their own progress. They wished for greater opportunity to demonstrate their progression from participants to graduates. However, 'graduating' also meant closing off the very avenue through which such progress had been made possible. As we set out in the following section, this process of ending also marked the end of important relationships.

AFTER – OTHER

Introduction

As signalled by the 'self' section, children associated the loss of their connections with other children with feelings of sadness and grief. Unsurprisingly, these other children were the most frequently discussed 'others' that children referred to in their narratives of 'after' Refuge. Like adults, children felt immense sadness that the friendships they had invested in were suddenly unavailable to them, and indicated that they were powerless in the face of adults' decisions, which decreed that these friendships could not be continued.

In the previous chapter *('During')*, we touched upon children's commitment to ensuring that other children have positive Refuge experiences and are well taken care of. In this chapter, children expand on the significance they have placed on their relationships with other children at Refuge, and in doing so, illuminate the depth of their grief and sadness when these relationships are lost.

Children

The importance of relationships with other children was instantly framed by Ihaka (9) who, without hesitation, started to pick out the right pens with which to draw a picture of his favourite things at Refuge:

Interviewer	*So the first thing I'm going to get you to draw is your favourite thing about being at Refuge.*
Ihaka	**It's the kids.**

Ihaka (9) and Kauri (8) spent a lot of time speaking about their feelings of loss engendered by the severance of friendships that came hand in hand with the ending of their children's programme. Kauri held his chin in both hands as he remembered his friends. Ihaka's face became pensive as he took the time to contemplate the loss of connection with the children he had felt so close to. Both then touch upon the perceived permanence of this loss.

> Interviewer   How did you feel when you finished [Refuge programme].
> **Ihaka**   **Sad.**
> Interviewer   Sad, how come?
> **Ihaka**   **Because we had heaps of friends.**
> **Kauri**   **And we won't be able to see them for a really long time, like forever.**
> **Ihaka**   **We might see them when we're adults.**

To Kauri and Ihaka, the prospect of adulthood felt like a lifetime away - so distant that it offered no real comfort. Like other participants, they conceptualised these connections as markedly different from friendships outside of the Refuge context, because they were predicated on a commonality of experience.

> Interviewer   So if you feel sad when you left, how come?
> **Kauri**   **Because I spent heaps of time with them.**
> Interviewer   You spent heaps of time with them.
> **Kauri**   **And they were my closest, and they were my best friends.**
> Interviewer   They were your best friends.
> **Kauri**   **They were really close and encouraged me to be nice.**

Children indicated that they did not simply participate at Refuge alongside other children, but that the dynamic between their new friends was instrumental in several ways. It helped to shape their investment in programmes, what they learnt in programmes, and the personal satisfaction they derived from their participation. Kauri's use of the term 'best friends' to describe the quality of these friendships indicates the immense benefit he felt from them. Kauri valued the encouragement that his friends offered, perceiving his connection with them as a reciprocal and intensely meaningful relationship.

Similarly to Kauri's framing of his Refuge friendships as 'closest', Charlotte (9) articulated the feeling of solidarity experienced when alongside other children with similar histories and experiences. She explained that "it means you get a bigger chance to express yourself and things like that." She clarified that she could distinguish between people who could comprehend her situation and people who could not, stating that she had tried to talk to others about it before coming to Refuge without much luck. The ending of this opportunity to be heard amongst peers (arguably precluded in other contexts because of the destabilising impacts of family violence) was therefore a source of loss and sadness.

Tai (8) also felt this sadness and loss. He had mentioned feeling "happy that I get to meet new people" when considering the possibilities that Refuge offered him. However, his positive experiences were met with feelings of immense grief and loss; his picture portrays the anguish he felt leaving his new friends upon completion of his programme.

Tai (Age 8)

In the below example, Ihaka (9) and Kauri (8) finished a revolving children's programme shortly after another child had entered it. They explained the situation in the picture Ihaka has drawn. Grief was palpable as the boys' faces turned down; Kauri's usually cheeky face descended into a scowl. They bravely described the injustice they felt at being torn away from their support, and their chance to support others. Their expressed sadness was both about the abrupt loss of their connection with other children and the missed opportunity to connect with yet another child with whom they had some commonality. Importantly, they highlighted the personal investment they had made (and would make) in getting to know people, followed by the acuity of their loss when their investment in care and connection was cut off.

Ihaka's picture is of his last day in his programme, coinciding with the new girl's first day. Ihaka has drawn the sadness on their faces while waving goodbye.

Ihaka (Age 9)

Interviewer	*So what is happening in this after picture here?*
Ihaka	**I was upset because we were going.**
Interviewer	*You were upset?*
Ihaka	**Yeah because we just got to know a new person.**
Interviewer	*How did it feel when you finished?*
Kauri	**We didn't even get to know her.**
Ihaka	**Kind of sad.**
Interviewer	*What do you think would help make it feel less sad?*
Ihaka	**If we could like…**
Kauri	**If we could like, stay a little bit longer so we can know her more and make some more friends.**
Interviewer	*What were you going to say, Ihaka?*
Ihaka	**I don't know maybe like us calling them and saying hi.**
Interviewer	*You would have liked calling and saying hi.*

Charlotte also felt that the ending of her participation was a sharply felt loss, and one that she struggled to come to terms with in the absence of a dedicated time and space for goodbyes to be leisurely and meaningful. She proposed options that could facilitate a brief extension of the genuine peer connection she had accessed through the programme without the ending being tagged onto a final session, she felt that the last session should be free from 'work' and solely for the purpose of fun and goodbyes. She said "they could throw, like, a little after-party… so, like, the people could come back and have one more session, but it wouldn't be involved, like, work and stuff. It would be more like a party thing".

When children were asked what they would say to other children if they had the chance, they invariably responded with great enthusiasm, expansive body language, and immediacy - none of them had to take any time to think about their answers. Their responses centred on values; being kind, showing care, making it fun, and looking out for others were all common answers. They argued that there was a missed opportunity for those who had left or graduated to return in some

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capacity, proposing that this would have a dual benefit of providing closure or continued involvement for them and a comforting or aspirational voice for new children.

> *Interviewer*   *What advice would you give them, as someone who has already finished the programme, and you are going in there to talk to them, what advice would you tell them?*
>
> **Kauri**   **I would tell them what have I learned and I would tell them how was it fun and I would ask them how it was [how they are finding it].**
>
> *Interviewer*   *What would you want to tell them Ihaka?*
>
> **Ihaka**   **Be good, be safe, care for each other and be good.**

Mums

As evidenced above, children's most discussed 'other' characters in the stories of their endings at Refuge were other children, even though these were rendered temporary by the nature of children's support. The second most discussed 'other' character in children's narratives was that of their mothers, who represented permanency beyond the Refuge context.

The interview setting provided a rare and immensely valuable setting to observe the interplay between each sibling group and their Mum, or, if Mum was not present or partially present during the interviews, to observe how Mum featured in children's narratives and in dialogue between siblings. Without exception, Mum featured in these children's interviews as the proximal, safe, and responsive caregiver, functioning as a source of certainty and security and as an arbiter of acceptable behaviour. Kahurangi shows the strength of this relationship in her 'after' drawing:

Kahurangi (Age 10)

> **Kahurangi** **That's me and Mum is holding me.**
> *Interviewer* *That's your Mum holding you?*
> **Kahurangi** **Yeah, Mum is hugging me and lifting me.**
> *Interviewer* *Cool.*
> **Kahurangi** **And I go like this [shows with her hands underneath her arm
> pits] and Mum actually lifts me.**
> *Interviewer* *Why is it nice to be hugged and lifted up?*
> **Kahurangi** **One, because it is respectful and two, because it feels great.**

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the dialogue in interviews was punctuated by informal conversation and encouragement when Mums were present. While integral to the collection of data itself, the witnessed dynamics also prompted a post-interview reflection entry noting the collective interview as a possible area of practice strength in non-crisis situations. Reinforcing this, several of the mothers mentioned after the completion of interviews that this was the first opportunity they had had to hear about the entirety of their children's experiences from their children's perspectives. So much of their initial impressions and teachings from the children's programmes were new to them. Having these sessions with Mum present may therefore offer an additional measure of both safety and viability of advocacy work with children in the community.

Dads

As discussed above, children's characterisations of 'Mum' throughout their stories were of safety and responsiveness. In contrast, their characterisations of 'Dad' were significantly more variable, emotionally charged, and at times contradictory – their narratives of past experiences featured some happy or gratifying experiences involving Dad, but these were interspersed with allusions to his pattern of violence and the far-reaching implications to their family dynamic and immediate social context.

Unlike when they spoke about their mothers, who tended to be storied in relation to children's emotional processing and everyday life activities, they typically spoke about Dad in relation to discrete (often fun) events or toys/goods. Evan (7), for example, talked about his father giving him great presents. During the interview, Evan's pride regarding his father's demonstrated affection through this gift-giving was self-evident, and he, like many of the children, was animated in his storytelling as he referenced 'good' or 'fun' times with Dad. Ambrose, Jax, and Emma similarly mention Dad in association with the toys that they owned when living with him, focusing more on the positive memories of them than on the subsequent abuse that escalated to the extent that the children and their mother had to leave their region to seek safety. Other children referenced the loss of Dad without mentioning him specifically. Awhina and Aaria, for example, spoke about being afraid that the violence 'would also happen to them' without identifying that someone in particular had perpetrated that violence. Awhina and Aaria discussed how nice it was that 'the girls' (including their mother) were all at the safehouse together, and agreed with one another that they could relax and feel calmer now that the "violence and shouting had gone".

In an interview with Kahurangi and Tai, the multiplicity of the different characters that Dad could represent in their stories was particularly stark. Their Dad is now in prison, and their non-verbal cues when speaking about him (such as brief pauses, looking away, and momentary preoccupation) conveyed their continuing sadness about how their family unit now looks. At the same time, they raised the topic of Dad very early in the first interview, and also enthusiastically recounted positive memories of doing fun activities with him.

Their articulation of their loss of Dad in their everyday lives was interwoven with the loss of material comfort or material stability as a result of the consequences of his violence. Kahurangi, for instance, associated recollections of Dad with having to leave the home they had shared with Dad, and therefore their TV. This association of loss beyond Dad as an individual was shared by several other children, who equated the presence of the father in their lives with desirable

acquisitions or with community belonging. For these children, changes to these relationships after their fathers' use of violence also meant the loss of significant places, possessions, and social conditions.

Importantly, the children appeared to still hold and portray their fathers in a very positive light and used possessive and collective language (such as "my dad did…" or "the toys were ours") while at the same time expressing (verbally or otherwise) their trepidation or even fear at the prospect of seeing their fathers again. When we considered both the multiplicity of roles that Dad played in children's stories *and* the ways children responded to and made sense of this multiplicity, some of the complexities surrounding the positionality of 'Dad' became much clearer.

For many of the children, Dad was variably: a (even if troubled) subject of attachment; a person from whom approval and affection was desired; a lingering unpredictability; a barrier to their own and their mothers' safety; a symbol of fun, joy, and entertainment; an intimidating or even menacing figure; a representation of economic and social stability; a treasured memory; a source of stress, division, upheaval, loss, or grief; and a person signifying belonging, protection, and unity. To them, Dad was never just one of these. Some of the complexities of navigating this amorphous 'dad' character with children are further signalled through the excerpt of the interviewer's post-interview reflection entry below:

The kids mentioned Dad quite a bit, but they always veered away really quickly afterwards and focused on something else. I left the subject of Dad for them to lead, but I kept having the strong feeling that the stuff with Dad is right there under the surface and they want to talk about it but can't, or that they needed to be given explicit permission to. He wasn't in the drawings of the family that they did. I'm not sure whether this is because they don't feel like he's part of their family unit now, or whether they somehow feel like it would be frowned upon to include him. They didn't talk in much detail about working through any thoughts about Dad in programmes – I wonder how much that is explored, and how Dad is framed in those discussions? He seems to be many things – there are some good memories, there's some sadness, and I keep coming back to this feeling that these kids are dealing with grief. Today the kids showed a lot of tension every time Dad came up. Right now I have two questions – what's Refuge's responsibility to introduce and work through the topic of Dad with the kids? And how do we do this so that we validate the kids' positive feelings or memories but also the really negative ones, and what those mean for them?

At the time that we interviewed, four of the children (two sibling groups) were still patently in need of protection from Dad. Although we opted not to include children's descriptions of these arrangements here to protect their anonymity, children's understanding of the requirement to still see their fathers was imbued with apprehension, reluctance, and helplessness. Evidently, programme participation or individual support cannot, on its own, 'resolve' these complicated feelings, but may open up exploration of the different roles he might play in children's lives.

Conclusion

Other children, Mums, and Dads are all influential in how children experience their Refuge endings. Other children orient their perceived gains and their relational safety and progress. Mums are sources of continued stability, whose gains have secondary benefits for children's own stability. Dads are less at the forefront of children's dialogue, but nevertheless influential to how children perceive family, safety, and predictability of their futures.

CONCLUDING THE 'AFTER'

Children did not experience Refuge or their exit from Refuge in isolation; rather, their experiences were associated with and informed by other key characters. They formed meaningful, significant relationships with other children, and benefited both from helping and being helped within the group dynamic. The loss of this was painful; it meant another 'tearing away' of the self character from proximal other characters. Ending their Refuge involvement was therefore textured by competing emotions. Children could easily and confidently recount how their participation led to them feeling safer, feeling connected to and with others, and developing greater insight, confidence, and certainty about their lives. But they also indicated that their completion was marked by a feeling of uncertainty and loss, which in many ways replicated the distress accompanying their entry to the service.

In this chapter, children offered insight into what they feel is imperative to their continued care. In particular, they highlighted the need for Refuge to have ongoing contact with children beyond their participation in programmes or their stay at a safehouse. They demonstrated the need for targeted services and spaces that are 'just for them', and the need for advocates to seek meaningful and continuous feedback from children about how they experienced Refuge and what they still need. Finally, through their characterisation of the people who influence their 'after' the most, their stories underscore the need for advocates interacting with children to be family-violence informed and child-centred.

Chapter Five: Continuity

Kia ora kids, we are nearly there! You've sat all the way through this research process and that is awesome! This last section shows the adults reading this how thoughtful and determined you have been in your learning at Refuge and how that learning may help you later in life. You show how kind, and thoughtful you are and how you are able to use the skills you practiced at Refuge while doing everyday things! It also highlights your innovation and ideas for how to make things better for Refuge.

We included this section to help tell your full story from start to finish. You had so much to share that may help the kids and Mums who are in Refuge, and those who are still on their way. Most of all, this section shows just how awesome you all are, you have given us so much to think about and work with. We now know so much more about what you need and how we can start to make things more focused on you! Your voices are powerful and important, now and always.

OVERVIEW

Children chose many different ways to communicate their stories and express their feelings and emotions with us. Some preferred to talk non-stop, while others drew detailed pictures or dramatically acted out their ideas. The individuality and authenticity of their participation was premised on the interviewer's purposeful relationship-building with each individual child, and our emphasis on collaborating with children to facilitate their involvement as experts in our research process. After analysing the data that emerged through and from their narratives, the need for this additional chapter became evident. While structured differently to the previous findings chapters, it draws together the role of relationships and continuity as orienting all of the different components of children's experiences. The data presented in this chapter is therefore a combination of stories told by the children, and stories created collaboratively between the children and interviewer.

In addition, making the links of continuity explicit reflects our use of it as a core conceptual component of our analysis. It supported our emphasis on the interaction *between* temporal phases and 'setting', 'self', and 'other', rather than relying on the separation of them. Continuity was often inextricable from the individual themes in each phase. This concluding findings chapter therefore showcases children's stories across their 'before', 'during' and 'after', and honours the integrity of children's complete narratives.

This chapter focuses on the stories of two extraordinary children, who at ages eight and nine were incredibly articulate about confident with what they chose to share. Their willingness to explore their experiences and ideas with Refuge emphasises how much children have to offer in a research process, and why they deserve to have their participation honoured.

KAURI'S CYCLE OF FORMATIVE LEARNING

8 years old
"He will be a good man when he is grown up"

We begin with the interviewer's account of interviewing Kauri and Ihaka below.

To say that I was excited to visit Kauri, his older brother Ihaka, and their Mum for a second time is an understatement. From outside their front door, I could hear the boys yelling that I have arrived. I was then sandwiched in a ginormous hug as they began to talk non-stop about everything that had happened in the two weeks since I saw them last. Kauri is a gentle, respectful, inquisitive, and hilarious kid. He is proud of who he is, and on that day he relayed many stories with confidence and humour. His pride in his older brother's abilities and achievements was evident in his animated re-telling of stories involving them both. Kauri and Ihaka were especially proud of their Mum. Kauri boasted that his Mum "actually gave birth to me, and that would have been very hard" and named this as one of the reasons that he chooses to listen to and respect her.

One message that stood out from Kauri's time at Refuge was to "be kind". He narrated different experiences he has had with being kind, and in doing so was able to apply this newly embedded part of his identity to his projected future self. Kauri was asked "why do you think being kind and nice is good to know?" He responded with: "so you know how to be kind to other people, so they can be kind to you." His answer depicts a cycle of positive regard, where the intentions of his kindness have dual implications: they enable others to experience positive feelings, and he will benefit from their returned kindness.

His standout story evidences his ability to apply and comprehend what he learnt in Refuge to situations external to the Refuge context. Kauri explained that while shopping for water one day, he had an interaction with the shopkeeper that filled him with a sense of pride. "There was a lady [shopkeeper] and I'd be like *'excuse me, do you guys have any water?'* and she said *'no'* and then I walked back to Mum." A bit later, Kauri was with his Mum and he saw the same shopkeeper and "she was like *'is that your son?'* and Mum was like *'yeah'*". Then the shopkeeper, speaking to Kauri's Mum, said "*'well he is a good man, and he will be a good man when he is grown up'*". Hearing positive and affirming responses to his respectful behaviour made Kauri feel "special". He continued by stating that "I didn't even know she would say that...she is the only lady who said

something nice to me". This interaction affirmed his behaviour and the evolution of kindness as part of his identity.

> *Interviewer*   *What do you think being a good man [when you are grown up] means?*
> **Kauri**   **That means you will be a good man to your Mum, and you will be a good man to your girlfriend.**

The immediate and decisive way that Kauri responds suggests that this is something he may have spent a lot of time pondering, or, possibly, is an answer that he instantly feels certain is correct. Earlier in the interview Kauri proclaimed that "I know how Refuge helped me", and his cycle of learning evidences the lasting impact Refuge has had on his development. He tells his story in a way that suggests he is unburdened by his identity as a boy capable of kindness. Rather, that kindness is something that has a proven value to him, reinforcing who he surrounds himself with and how he critiques the standard of character displayed in others.

> *Interviewer*   *So, whoever you are with has to treat your family nicely?*
> **Kauri**   **Yeah and my Mum!**

The way he describes kindness is not only something that he can 'use' when needed, but it is an intrinsic part of how he sees his current and future self. His 'kindness' is more than simply a 'new skill'; it is something that he hopes to carry for life as an enduring part of his identity. For Kauri kindness is a foundational value that shows who he is and the kind of boy, friend, son, partner, and man he wants to be.

Telling a follow up story, Kauri again demonstrates his understanding of kindness as extending beyond the spatial bounds of Refuge. Projecting the outcomes of kindness onto situations for others demonstrates that he would like others to benefit from kindness. He expresses his ideas and strategies for a boy he knew who has been unkind to a sibling.

> *Interviewer*   *What do you think would help [the boy] be a good man later on like you?*
> **Kauri**   **Use his manners, be nice to his sister and care, care for his family, don't be naughty and yeah.**

Kauri felt that this boy needed to think about how he was treating others. Care of whānau shines through as important to Kauri as he conceptualises total kindness. As he gives his ideas for the 'boy's' situation, it is apparent that kindness is more than one interaction or social dynamic, instead it is something that is perennially enacted and dispersed within a wider whānau unit. He

does not only prioritise the relationship of the boy and his sister, rather he comprehends that if there is whānau kindness and care then everyone can be incorporated and supported.

From Kauri's stories, we see how able he is to capture and articulate his feelings about what he has learnt at Refuge - he can express rationale for employing his learning through complex and nuanced examples. A fundamental finding is therefore the importance of services providing the opportunity for rehearsal, repetition, and reinforcement of the more theoretical aspects of programmes, such as in relation to children's 'ideal self'.

Kauri and his brother Ihaka reflect on other important learning, but end up concentrating on their biggest takeaway from their contact with Refuge. Their recurrent focus indicates that kindness permeates their developing self-concept. They depict it as intrinsic to how they wish to carry themselves, and as something that has the potential to impact upon everyone who crosses their paths from now on.

Kauri	*All I want you to do is stay kind even if anybody else be mean to you, still stay kind and never ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, treat your Mum bad.*
Ihaka	*Or dad.*
Kauri	*Or dad.*

CHARLOTTE'S PROPOSAL

9 years old

"Well, I have made a proposal to give to you so you can hopefully use some of my ideas to make your own proposal to give to the people you work for."

The significance of Charlotte's proposal was only fully understood toward the end of the writing process. We (the researchers) were sitting together one evening discussing the shifts we had in our approach to understanding children. Little did we know that although we had come leaps and bounds from where we started with our original research aims, we were still underestimating the significance of the gift Charlotte had given Refuge.

Charlotte had imparted something that was still able to influence us right up until the last draft of this report. After pouring her heart into the writing and reciting of her proposal, we realised that she had given us a perfectly packaged teaching tool that encapsulates the key findings of this research. Charlotte's proposal is a tool that can help to teach adults *how* to hear meaning from children, instead of expecting them to display, demonstrate, or articulate meaning in a way that adults can observe and understand. This tool can teach adults to value the significance and weight of things children tell us and show us, even if, at face value they may seem childish, outlandish, obvious, simplistic, or just lacking in meaning.

Charlotte's Mum said that after hearing the research aims, Charlotte threw herself into "a little project" to help Refuge be "the best place for kids". Charlotte, standing with her shoulders back, proudly stated "it's like a proposal". This proposal was very much a collaboration between Charlotte and her Mum; Charlotte carefully writing down her ideas and reflections and her Mum's enthusiasm and encouragement aiding the process. Mum, just as eagerly, explained that they "speak about it when they go on long drives" which facilitates the sharing of their knowledge and experiences, helping to bridge the gap that has been evidenced in previous chapters about the lack of crossover for Mums and children.

The proposal sat in an "almost finished" state, waiting only on the pictures to be completely finished and the spelling to be thoroughly checked. A third meet up was suggested to handover the finished proposal at Charlotte's house. When I arrived, we caught up over a pizza dinner on the floor in the lounge. Charlotte and her Mum then busily found the "exact right" tripod to prop up the camera that would record Charlottes' explanation of her proposal.

The very existence of Charlotte's proposal shows the benefit of including children in issues relating to their care, and to the care of other children in similar situations. Charlotte, without realising it, in *"four pages of writing, five pages - if you include the page that I accidentally made too messy and had to do it again"* manages to target many of the findings prevalent in this research. She gives us the chance to hear them directly from her carefully considered perspective. The pride she has in her work emanates from her and reflects her willingness to participate in the research. The passion she has for the subject emphasises how deeply she understands the aims of the research, and how effective the research methods have been in encouraging her unfiltered participation.

Charlotte takes a deep breath, mutters something about Harry Potter, and begins to read the proposal out loud, expanding on the particularly important areas. Ideas in her proposal swing from the practical, to the fantastical and absurd, to the deliberate and honest, mirroring the progression of the interview experience I had with all the children who participated. However, her messages, like the key points from other children, are accessible and definitive and neatly tie in many elements of the research process. We therefore conclude this final findings chapter with her proposal in two versions. First, we display her proposal in its original form, as it speaks for itself and exemplifies much of what children's stories highlight throughout the previous findings chapters. Finally, we draw out key takeaway points and offer simple explanations to illustrate how transferable many of her recommendations are to the shared experiences of the *Kids in the Middle* children.

Charlotte's Proposal – page one

1. a Swing at refuge wod be cool because it halp us to relax. 2. I think more Role Play as an activity wod be good. I liked doing RolePlay and its a good way to helps kids Express themselves and it helps the techers lern a bit more about the Cilldren. 3. and it is alot of fun. doing RolePlay of the Book of the day wod also be good. 4. I think a two story pillow fort with a rock climing wall and a lader leding up to the 2 story with ferry lits wod be cool 5. to help kids carmdown. more space to work on activites. 6. I think every session NEEDS CAKE!!! Kai brings every one together, I liked sharing food with my friends it's a good way to get know evry one 7. Hot chocolate in the winter sessoins would be amazing!!

1. Recognise that children may feel equivalently strong emotions, that it is okay for them to do so, and that there needs to be a safe and comfortable environment for this to happen in.

2. Be attuned to how children express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences and the different ways children might process these and lead the development of relational safety for children.

3. Offer alternate methods that enable children to practice and embed what they have learnt.

4. Set up the environment to aid comfort and ongoing coping, in a way that is appealing to and age-appropriate for children.

5. Acknowledge the importance of the physical setting and the importance of separating space for 'work' from space for 'play'.

6. Encourage peer relationships and the celebration of children's hard work and achievements.

7. Build children's comfort and connection by making the most of every relational encounter .

8. the ham and mayo samwichs were MIND BLOWING!!!!

8. Demonstrate care for children's individual preferences.

9. We whent to the police station to visit it it was very fun and Help show that the police are here to Help

9. Increase children's confidnce in the systems charged with protecting them.

10. The content of the Program was perfect the things in pogram were great

10. Invite children's input into and evaluation of services targeted to them.

11. the length of the Pogram I thout was good

11. Avoid assuming children's communication parallels that of adults (Charlotte, for example, explained that she only said it was 'good' because she ran out of adjectives that were synonymous with 'great', but overall was happy with the length of the programme).

12. I Have an I dear about adopt a tedy I Had a favourite tedy named peace witch I LOVED to see every week it would be good for every Cilld to adopt a teddy while at the program so ther are no fights and so peace is not lonly.

12. Recognise that objects can symbolise companionship, consistency, and friendship for children.

13. I like doing the Book of the day and I think that more Activities on the Book of the day would be really cool.

13. Offer different activities that cater to different children's learning styles and preferences.

Charlotte's Proposal – page three

14. I think haveing more the leders so ^ cilldren can tak with out beeing INTERRUPIED!!!

14. Hire enough child-centred, family violence specialist advocates for all children to feel heard.

15. Helpd me alot and I recommend it to other people

15. Understand how motivated children are to ensure that other children will be able to access support and experience the same benefit that they did

CONCLUSION

There is no better way to conclude this chapter than with Charlotte's recommendations, which mirror some of the key points we raise in the next chapter, '*Discussion*'. During that chapter, and the subsequent chapter '*Implications*', these parallels become increasingly obvious. Charlotte unwittingly offered a unique opportunity for data triangulation; her proposal neatly and fittingly captures many of the imperatives arising from children's stories in the first four findings chapters. In short, Charlotte exemplified children's capacities to give both input and feedback, and to bring the experiences of children to the forefront of adults' minds.

Discussion

Kia ora Kids! We hope you will be happy with the way we wrote down all your amazing stories and experiences in the last five chapters. We found out so many helpful and important things, so a big thanks again for your opinions, ideas, and thoughts. We know you put so much hard work and energy into talking to us and want you to know that we would not have much to discuss if it wasn't for you!

In this next bit we talk more about some of the really good things you said. Like we did in the other chapters, we think about you and the space around you, your feelings, how you have grown and changed, and the safe and not so safe people in your lives. We really tried to hear about the areas you think we need to work harder at and do better at. We want to work with everyone to make things better for you. Most of all we want to keep on helping and supporting you long after we wave goodbye to you in our doorway.

OVERVIEW

Children's voices formed the basis for the five findings chapters. Throughout these, implications for minor service improvements and validation for current approaches were both plentiful. However, as we set out in this chapter, these are of secondary importance. Our principal interest is in the ways that these may be drawn together to offer ways of advancing our service and practice design. Although we organise this chapter according to the temporal phases of 'before', 'during', and 'after', the discussion within each stems back to our superordinate themes. Specifically, they stem back to:

- The idea of a mindset that privileges children and recognises the equivalence of their experiences;
- The onus on adults to be attuned to and informed by children, their needs, and their settings;
- the need to acknowledge how children build different forms of safety for themselves and match this with appropriate resource; and
- The need for perceived gains to self and safety to be more sustainable and transferable beyond Refuge.

Our first and overarching conclusion relates to the how well we centre children as we seek to improve the support available to them, and is oriented by our experience of researching as well as by children's narratives. The process of interviewing children as part of the research functioned as a parallel source of data; they facilitated our understanding of *how* we know, as well as *what* we know. As illustrated by Charlotte's proposal at the end of the previous chapter, only kids can teach us how to hear from and think about kids.

Unfortunately, what we have heard from children throughout this research suggests that we (adults, advocates, Refuges) do not always hear children. At the outset of this project, we regarded children as competent social actors who are still forming the skills and capabilities typical of adults. Accordingly, we had clear, straightforward aims. One of these was about "finding out which strengths, skills, and strategies children use to cope". Early in data collection, we began to question whether these aims were fit for purpose. Why, we wondered, should children have to prove to adults that they drew on distinct, definable strategies to 'cope'? What were we assuming about what these 'strategies' would look like to us, and to what extent did we expect these to be easily recognisable, classifiable strengths? Over time, we increasingly recognised that many

'coping skills' were not listable or taught. Rather, they were the sum of children's interactions with their physical and relational environments, and in particular with the nuanced ways that they experienced comfort and safety. Our exploration of children's 'skill' or 'strength' is also illustrative of the evolving way that we considered children within this research. We realised that to begin with, our conceptualisation of children as 'competent social actors' was still implicitly deficit – their 'competency' was, by developmental necessity, presumed to be lesser than adults' competency. Correspondingly, although intended to privilege children, our original research aims still had a deficit approach to how children were considered. By the end of data collection, our acknowledgement of children's competency grew to acknowledge the *legitimacy* of their expression. We understood that their comprehension, skills, and strengths manifested differently and were expressed in child-appropriate ways, but were no less complete than those of adults. Instead of viewing children's competence as constrained by age, we moved toward critiquing our own responsiveness to children and our competence in speaking *their* language rather than evaluating their ability to frame their own experiences in adult-appropriate ways. Their experiences and competence, we concluded, are equivalent (though different) to those of adults. However, it is the responsibility of adults, not children, to 'translate' – to recognise and privilege children's experiences and skills, and provide settings in which children can bring these forth.

We argue that the bridging factor between children's experiences and effective support is adults' preparedness. This preparedness has two key components. The first is adults' preparedness to challenge their own constructions of the child's experience of violence and their competency in coping (to 'translate' into and from a children's world). The second is their preparedness to invest. Children's preparedness to fully engage was evidenced throughout the findings and through the ways they showed up to take part in the research. Prior to children coming into their interviews, they had already prepared. They had already thought about what the interview could be like, they were excited to be working purposefully with the Refuge and the interviewer, they had ideas already formed in their minds, and they had some expectations of how the interview might go. Children invested in the research – through their thinking processes beforehand, by taking the time to communicate their ideas to adults who may not always 'get them', and in the energy they showed when telling us their hopes and fears.

It was not until children demonstrated this personal investment that we realised they had a strong and insightful grasp of the research – to them, it was not just for future children, but also for themselves, in that precise moment. The level of their individual investment in us and the research was unanticipated. While we aimed to make the process safe for them, so their insight would drive

change, we underestimated what each child was actively contributing at the time. Our recognition of their investment and their capacity to contribute to this research highlighted that for children to meaningfully participate, we needed to privilege them, in every aspect of our interactions. They were not simply conduits to child-specific insights, but key players who coached us in our emerging understanding of children's worlds. In the findings, when they tell us their thoughts about the place of children at Women's Refuge, they are now asking for an equivalent level of preparedness and investment into children from Refuge. This preparedness and investment needs to start before children's 'before', and continue until after children's 'after', as we explain throughout the remainder of this chapter.

BEFORE – SETTING

To work with children where they are at, we must first comprehend where they came from. Children's contexts prior to intervention are often tumultuous; plagued with conflict, violence, and coercion (Noble-Carr et al., 2020). There is a very well-established body of evidence documenting both the reality of these contexts and the immense range of potential adverse impacts on children (Cunningham & Baker, 2007). Rather than belabour the potential for adverse outcomes, our focus is on their support experience. Relatively unexplored in the body of literature, are children's meaning-making and interpretation of their own truths after they have lived through this violence. Some authors have touched upon children's 'awareness' of the violence (e.g. Gregory et al., 2019), the consequences their families face after violence (Goldblatt, 2003), and some of the losses they endure during the process of 'leaving' (Mullender et al., 2002). This research was not oriented toward a similar exploration of children's emotional experiencing of family violence. It instead aims to capture some of the ways that children remember and think about their time at Refuge, and what these stories offer in terms of how we design support specifically for children.

Although they were not specifically asked to talk about their experiences of family violence, children's stories poignantly illustrated both their experiences prior to leaving, and the emotional journeys that they then endured immediately prior to accessing Refuge. Children helped us to understand where their journeys of Refuge truly began. Their stories of 'before' Refuge highlighted that when advocates are interacting with a child for the first time, this is not the 'beginning' of the child's journey. Neither they, nor their ideas of Refuge, are blank slates at the time that they arrive. Accordingly, our intervention with and for children does not begin when they arrive at a Refuge door, but rather within our mindset, preceding their arrival. Traditionally, literature on children's support associates the term 'early intervention' with 'fixing' children (or their circumstances) after they experience something negative. However, children's narratives of support-seeking reinforced the opposite; that the 'deficit' is not situated within children, but in adults' perceptions of children's needs.

Part of our perception of children's needs must be driven by our awareness of the family violence backdrop – children's home settings at the time that their destination point becomes Refuge. Chapter two ('*Before*') set out the powerlessness children felt over situations and immediate futures. This is consistent with previous studies (Swanston et al., 2014), where children's lack of control over their circumstances after violence, left them feeling powerless and uncertain. These emotions did not necessarily subside from the outset of their engagement with Refuge; many

aspects of their futures remained uncertain. While powerlessness is not in of itself a 'new' finding (Beetham et al., 2019, Noble-Carr et al., 2020; Stanley et al., 2012; Swanston et al., 2014), *Kids in the Middle* offers novel exploration of how adults' decision-making, even if well-intentioned and protective, can still engender powerlessness and confusion.

Children's epistemic status means that their voice as service users may be disregarded or downgraded by adults (Eriksson & Appel Nissen, 2017). However, much of power differential in decision-making for children is inherent (and important) in adult-child relationships, and (in chapters two and four) children themselves acknowledged adults' (particularly mothers') responsibilities for decision-making on their behalf. They do not ask that their relative powerlessness be somehow 'solved', but they do need advocates to understand it and to recognise how even well-intentioned support can sometimes reinforce that feeling for them. Above all, they drive home the point that while children come in with their mothers, they are clients in their own right. Advocates' decision-making impacts children *as clients,* not just as appendices of their mothers. Minimising how children experience powerlessness is predicated on recognition of their individual client status.

The basis for this recognition begins at our comprehension of children's original perceptions of what Women's Refuge is. As children so eloquently portray in chapter two ('*Before*'), the concept of 'going to Refuge' is often little supported by targeted communication to and with children. The 'going to' typically occurs following intensely stressful events, and children are aware that their mothers are facing significant pressure and change as well as themselves. Chapter two ('*Before*') underlines the minimal information children had about what they would find when they arrived at Refuge. Clearly, the admission process is principally (and understandably) targeted at children's mothers, reflecting Women's Refuge's historical core purpose. However, although children accompany their mothers during this process of admission, the adult framing of an induction to the service does not easily translate into meaningful information for children. If children have equivalent client status, the planning for their entry to Refuge should be equivalently designed. Unless these processes are re-targeted to offer a parallel focus on inducting children in ways meaningful to them, opportunities to engage with and support children may go unrealised (Eriksson & Appel Nissen, 2017).

In death review reports internationally, authors identified barriers to family violence service provision for children, suggesting that while children are often admitted to services, their unique needs are not sufficiently recognised within these (Reif & Jaffe, 2019). Accordingly, children's

recollections of their journeys and arrival highlight the need to offer an orientation for children that is just as comprehensive and just as developmentally appropriate as the one that adults routinely receive. As shown in the 'before' chapter, the information children are given (and how this is given) is instrumental in shaping how comfortable and safe they feel in the Refuge setting. The importance of taking the time to build children's familiarity with new spaces (Beetham et al., 2019), including the minutiae of implicit "rules" or conventions governing those spaces, cannot be overlooked. Next, we look at children's beginnings at Refuge, and the onus on adults to recognise what children bring with them.

BEFORE – SELF

Chapter two ('*Before*') showcases how the children's worry, apprehension, relief, and fear of the unknown are as complex and nuanced as they might be for adults. As discussed above, children are clients of Refuge. When they first arrived, they had just experienced immense distress and upheaval. As found in similar studies, emotional turmoil at that moment was common (Stanley et al., 2012; Swanston et al., 2014). They showed us how difficult it was to translate those feelings into adult words, but how proficiently they were able to share them and make sense of them in other ways. This underlines the importance of considering children as capable of complex cognitive processing rather than as passive blank slates. Children expressed profound relief at the prospect of safety, but at the same time felt unsure of how people would respond to them and what their new physical environment entailed. In addition, they showed a sophisticated and evolving analysis of safety that encompassed physical safety, emotional safety, and family safety.

From this we concluded that although children express these concerns in different ways than adults, childlike expression does not indicate superficiality of feeling. Children's articulation of these emotions may be heard and observed by adults as less meaningful or impactful. Humphreys et al. (2011) similarly acknowledges the breadth of children's emotional experiencing and expression. Meanwhile, the discrepant privileging of how adults communicate was also identified by Houghton (2015), who argued that children's voices must be both heard and weighted equally to adults' voices. This research, however, takes this one step further: the 'gap' in recognising and responding to children's emotional experiences is not with children's competency in conveying them, but with our attunement to how these manifest for children. We argue that to equivalently weight children's experiences is not enough: there is then a corresponding onus to think from within a children's world to hear and prioritise their experiences in our design of services for them. This focus on meeting children's expression with adult attunement and investment is a core finding of this study, and shapes the following section's discussion of the roles of advocates engaging with children.

BEFORE – OTHER

Advocates are key characters in children's Refuge stories. What they bring with them when they work with children shapes how children experience and benefit from Refuge. Children want advocates to show up for them, to connect with them, and to bring with them both their specialisms: their family violence specialism, and their child-centred specialism. The 'before' of the advocates' role – their knowledge, skill, and practice approach that they are equipped with before they first meet with a child – therefore sets the scene for children's experiences of Refuge.

The 'before' findings chapter demonstrates children's recollections of their initial interactions. Advocates being 'warm' and 'welcoming' was central to children's comfort as they carved out a position for themselves in a brand new (and temporary) environment. As the findings illustrate, their arrival at Refuge signalled the beginning of change – they had emerged from home environments that to some degree were all characterized by an undercurrent of control and hostility, engendered by perpetrators' patterns of violence. Although their physical safety from violence was supported by being at Refuge, their emotional safety was less guaranteed. Both Eriksson (2012) and Richard-Foster et al (2012) note that children's remembered and anticipated risk precludes their emotional safety even when they are physically protected from harm. Correspondingly, children's stories of their Refuge beginnings emphasised that a sense of emotional safety could not be endowed; it must be discerned and created by them in response to both the physical and relational conditions around them. Children's excerpts, set out in the 'other' section of chapter two ('*Before*'), illustrate how intentional these interactions with children need to be, and draw attention to the skills and knowledge-bases that key characters need to master prior to interacting with children. Both the value of tailoring communication to match children's needs and the importance of understanding the context of exposure to violence were plainly signalled.

Children's stories of their arrivals showed that they turned up at Refuge with preconceived expectations, which were informed by any points of reference they could draw from. These assumptions about Refuge, accurate or otherwise, nevertheless formed a compelling internal dialogue before children ever actually met an advocate. Patently, if information is communicated in ways designed for adults, children do not have the means to build an accurate picture of Refuge ahead of their own involvement, highlighting, again, the need to be child-centred in our approach to communicating information (Bowyer et al., 2015; Eriksson, 2012; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012).

Children's narratives also showed how powerfully their first impressions of advocates shaped their subsequent expectations of how responsive Refuge would be to them. Unsurprisingly, it then followed that their ad-hoc encounters with advocates served to update their internal understanding and expectations, even when those encounters were not inherently purposeful. Everyday encounters are themselves a source of data for children, accordingly, if these are not child-centred, they represent a threat to the accessibility of emotional safety for children. At the time they arrived at Refuge, children remembered being preoccupied with the potential for hostile or unwelcoming encounters with advocates or with other children. Demonstrative warmth and explicitly welcoming interactions went a long way toward ameliorating this – showing warmth, smiling, being fun, and using body language and tones of voice that convey that children are welcome helped to counteract children's deeply rooted worries. In short, each small, purposeful, child-centred interaction contributed to children's cumulative sense of emotional safety. Further, while not explicitly discussed by children, it stands to reason that advocates also need to affirm children's cultural identities and expression. As children expressed throughout their interviews, talking about their experiences is 'work'. It represents a mental burden; one that is amplified if the listener is not attuned to their individual context. Children's experiences of violence cannot be extricated from their cultural identity or from their experiences of how that identity is responded to by the people and structures around them (Murphy et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2015).

In addition to highlighting the value of demonstrated warmth, children's narratives put the onus on advocates to see children in the contexts of their individual backdrops. They emphasised the need for advocates to really understand what children bring with them to Refuge when family violence has been part of their landscape at home. They also reminded us that children's engagement can unfold at different paces and according to different children's capacities. This emphasises that it is the advocate's role, to guide this engagement and help that child to process their experiences, reinforcing McGee's (2000) focus on the role of the family violence specialism. Meeting children's needs thus requires advocates to have a thorough professional grounding in in family violence. In the following section, we explain why this needs to be paired with a child-centred approach to respond to how children experience both violence and safety.

DURING – SETTING

At the beginning of this chapter, we touched upon how we reconsidered our original aims after hearing directly from children; in particular, how they established comfort, coping, and safety. Over time, our initially aim to identify discrete skills or strategies morphed into an appreciation of how for children, comfort, coping, and safety were built from the settings around them.

In chapter three *('During')*, we set out how children ascribed meaning to the physical, relational, and structural aspects of the Refuge environment. This then became the foundation for their 'coping', and, relatedly, for how they negotiated a sense of safety. Toys, for example, and the senses of belonging, consistency, and predictability that they represented, were integral to children's capacity to find comfort. These toys personalised the house to be a space where they felt they had permission to be kids, to play, and to freely use the toys intended for them. In addition, children's conceptualisations of a 'dream Refuge' demonstrated the paramountcy of children having ownership over their space by both protecting their *ability* to play and by designating plentiful *space* to play. Their play signified more than simply enjoyment. Children's stories featured play as a method of enacting safety scenarios or identifying protective mechanisms around them, despite initially appearing to be 'just fun'. Children's attribution of significance to objects and activities in their everyday environments, including play, showed that they access safety for themselves in a number of ways. These include exercising ownership over their physical space, establishing ritual and consistency, delineating learning or work areas and play areas, and having a range of toys available for play they find affirming. Our evolving understanding of the multiplicity of meanings that children interpret from how and where they play has further implications for how services conceptualise children's activities. Just as it was easy for us to mistakenly reduce children's stories of toys to a single superficial narrative, of children's preference for entertainment, other adults may draw similar conclusions. In sum, children showed that they can capably and intentionally derive safety from their environments. We conclude that adults have a responsibility to purposefully set up children's spaces to honour the different ways they find comfort.

There are few studies exploring the contextual aspects of children's experiences of family violence services. However, two studies in particular focus on the role of the service environment. Swanson et al. (2014) interviewed children and their mothers in a family violence service about their understanding of violence. They found that children's perceptions of the environment as a 'safe space' and the presence of 'safe adults' influenced how comfortable they felt to speak about

their experiences of violence. However, their findings were limited to how this role facilitated children's verbal processing of their experiences. This is, we suggest, an adult interpretation of what represents safety for children. While arguably appropriate for the purposes of Swanson's et al. (2014) study, *Kids in the Middle* instead offers a shift in paradigm, using children's own conceptualisations of safety as a benchmark.

The conceptualisation of safety as practically and symbolically attained through children's purposeful use of their environments has dual implications. First, it advances our recognition of children's competency. We begin to recognise that the ways they ascribe meanings to place, space, and relationships is inherently purposeful and safety-promoting. Unlike in Swanson's (2014) findings, we argue that children's environments do not 'give' them safety, but rather that children seek out and construct safety from their environments. Similarly, although adults have traditionally been charged with the responsibility of keeping children safe, we argue that they must also set the conditions so that children can construct their own safety. However, seeing and understanding how children do this requires us to think about children's environments from the perspectives of children. As discussed earlier in this chapter, attempting to start from a child perspective means radically departing from how children are conventionally (and secondarily) positioned within services aimed at keeping their mothers safe.

Second, it offers important insight into what resources can be strategically deployed to provide the means for children to build safety in ways meaningful for them. Pernebo and Almqvist (2016) also studied children aged four to six in a family violence children's programme. Their findings focus on both the context and the content of the group programme, suggesting that both were significant in children's experiences. Notably, they conclude that the relational context of the programme can offer a curative experience for children, and conclude that children derived more benefit from the contextual aspects than from the safety-promoting therapeutic activities. While important, this also signals an arbitrary distinction between environments that offer comfort or enjoyment, and children's attainment of safety. In contrast, we argue that the two are inextricable; that childrens' comfort is, in of itself, a precursor to safety. Children's competency in building this comfort for themselves does not negate the need for adult input; rather, it implies that this input must be led by what children identify as important. While they are the navigators of their safety and comfort, children are predominantly navigating a world that is curated for them by family violence specialists. Our role in enhancing children's safety is therefore predicated on how attuned we are to children's comfort, and how accessible the tools that children find comfort from

are within the Refuge setting. In the next section, we discuss how the setting curated for children also shapes the sustainability of the safety that they experience at Refuge.

DURING – SELF

The role of the environment in children's 'during' is as influential as it is in children's 'before'.

Children's emotional experiencing (and their consequent desire to seek safety) continues throughout their Refuge journey. During this time, they are supported by advocates and, arguably, by other children to both learn and make sense of their experiences. This section therefore discusses how children perceive their own safety while doing so, and what supports, impedes, or contributes to their participation at Refuge.

Children told us that their worries about their own and their families' futures did not dissipate once they were immersed at Refuge, but manifested in slightly different ways as a result of the perceived temporary nature of their time there. From what we understand from chapter two ('*Before*'), these concerns are deeper than simply a preoccupation with a single possible outcome. Rather, children extrapolate their understanding of their current and past circumstances and apply this to their imagined futures. Adolescents' in Goldblatt's (2003) study describe this as feeling physically 'safe' when outside of the 'home environment' or out of range of physical violence, but emotionally 'unsafe' as if they were still mentally there. Given the extent of uncertainty and distress in children's family contexts prior to accessing Refuge, they are not confident that 'what comes next' for them will be a marked improvement on their experiences to date. In addition, their lack of control over what is instigated in their lives forms a significant backdrop to their consideration of what comes next; they do not necessarily anticipate that they will be able to have a say over future decisions involving them. Advocates supporting children must therefore recognise that their concerns about safety are unresolved.

Children's comprehension and application of particular concepts, displayed in chapter three *('During'),* also formed an integral part of the 'self', albeit in a less uniformly positive way. Most children linked what they regarded as their core values to the learning and practising of skills-based concepts (such as kauri's descriptions of "kindness"). This presents distinct practice implications. Children demonstrated their capacity to identify and draw upon particular skills and self-beliefs in relation to complex programme concepts, indicating the transferability of programme content to their current and future lives. At the same time, some children felt that their theoretical understanding and practical application of skills was constrained by insufficient time or opportunity for processing. The responsibility for fine-tuning and imagining scenarios of safety thereby fell to children to navigate alone, adding to their mental burden. As the findings chapters

showcase, children's preoccupation with future risk, their processing of past experiences, and their evolving self-perception all represented a child 'workload' while at Refuge.

This workload was not regarded as inherently negative; rather, it was at times both gratifying and enjoyable for children. Relatedly, Houghton (2015) explored the perspectives and experiences of young people engaging with family violence services, and make the salient point that 'enjoyment' facilitates the effectiveness of learning. Incorporating fun into activities that may otherwise (or still) be perceived as difficult, sensitive, or worrying helped the participants in their research to express themselves and advance difficult conversations in a group programme. We suggest that an extension of the fun activities currently facilitated within programmes may offer a reduction of children's individual workloads and the mental weight that these represent. Further, we propose that this mental weight relates to the perceived applicability of children's learning, and that it may be lessened by tailoring the content to address children's concerns.

As children's stories of imagined risk scenarios in the findings chapters indicate, the weight associated with children's workloads related not just to learning, but also to their opportunities to practise, test, embed, and discuss that learning. Creating opportunities to apply learning in scenarios specific to children's contexts outside of Refuge may therefore reposition this 'work' as collective and advocate-guided, reducing the individual burden on children. One potential mechanism to increase the applicability of children's learning is to involve their mothers and other safe caregivers more within the programmes their children are attending. Given the continuity of mothers and safe caregivers in these children's lives, they are best placed to support both consistency of learning and children's emotional expression both at and beyond Refuge.

Involving mothers in children's interventions has been similarly recommended by other authors. Houghton (2015), for instance, also concluded that it would be beneficial to include mothers in the 'fun' of children's programmes, so they could experience both children's learning and enjoyable ways of exploring difficult topics alongside their children. Humphreys et al. (2011) gives a slightly different rationale, positing that supporting mothers and children to communicate about their experiences should be a core focus of family violence intervention, aiming to address themes of silencing that may have been protectively enacted prior to help-seeking. Both aims are commendable. Ours, however, traverses both, but is principally oriented toward matching children's personal investment into learning of programme content with plentiful opportunities for this content to be practised, showcased, and embedded outside of Refuge. While there may be other contiguous benefits of increased mother involvement for both mothers and children, it may

foremost offer children relief from being solely responsible for how their learning within programmes might be later applied.

In addition, Howarth et al. (2016) points out that there is minimal evidence on the efficacy of interventions aimed at improving social and health outcomes of children exposed to family violence. While some of their key concepts are not transferable to the *Kids in the Middle* ethos (in particular, their focus on the pathology of children's exposure and children's behavioural and mental health outcomes), their recommendations for programme delivery do have some transferability. They found that child-focused psychoeducational groups effectively improve mental health outcomes for children, but that interventions delivered to the mother (as the child's safe parent) and child together yield the most improvement in children's behavioural outcomes (Howarth et al., 2016). As *Kids in the Middle* does not take a pathologising approach either to children's exposure or to their individual outcomes, we do not conceptualise our aims for children's participation at Refuge as 'correcting' their behaviour, but rather as offering resources to children that they may find useful. Accordingly, while slightly diverging from Howarth's framing of the benefits of including mothers, this crossover may offer greater potential for mothers to be brought into children's experiences of coping and safety, and for children and mothers to make sense of their own and each other's experiences in ways that both find meaningful and useful.

Mothers' involvement in our interviews with children further emphasise the benefits of a facilitated crossover of support for mothers, and support for children. We observed the emotional safety that this facilitated for children, mothers and children's increased awareness of each other's experiences, and the application of learning beyond the interview context. Arguably, these experiences are indicative of how mothers may be meaningfully involved in interventions for children as the primary arbiters of children's growing knowledge and self-development. Next, we explore the role of other children in that process of development.

DURING – OTHER

Children's capacity to selflessly consider 'Refuge' as a source of safety for many hypothetical children, as opposed to a singular site of safety for themselves and their families was demonstrated throughout their stories of 'other'. Their construction of 'need' centred on their belief that *they* are not the people most in need, but that other kids and their mothers are or will be. Accordingly, in their narratives they rarely focused on what would benefit themselves unless they also perceived it to have a similar benefit to others. Their ideas for the perfect Refuge for children centred on upscaling and upsizing the various aspects of Refuge that had brought them comfort and helped them to feel safe. In short, they perceived family violence as a much bigger issue that left many children just like them in need of support.

'Other' children played integral roles in children's stories of their time at Refuge in other ways. They clearly identified a sense of solidarity with other Refuge kids, predicated on their shared experience of exposure to violence and subsequent transitional burden. This sense of solidarity and commonality has been acknowledged by other researchers as important to personal identity (Yoder et al., 2003). Interestingly, children's stories displayed how programme participation fostered a growing understanding of themselves and their values, signifying that their identity development is both individual and relationally bound. They understood the 'self' and their own experience within a relationally dependent context that progressed with (and because of) other children. They claimed both individual and collective ownership over the 'work' that they did in conjunction with other programme participants. This authority over group functioning was regarded both as central to its success and as a source of personal pride. This was anticipated; Beetham et al. (2019) notes that children's lasting impressions of programme participation focus primarily on the experiential and relational aspects; in particular, how their programmes offered the chance to share and connect with other children.

Less anticipated was children's descriptions of a group dynamic deeper than simply collective participation. Once again, these descriptions affirmed the change of paradigm regarding children's competency that is represented throughout the *Kids in the Middle* research. Far from being somehow less equipped than adults to 'give' as well as simply benefit from programmes, children evidenced their own capacity to negotiate complex interpersonal settings and offer therapeutic benefit to other child participants. The importance of these relationships as meaningful rather than simply functional has been previously put forward by Beetham et al. (2019), who departs from the more conventional understanding of children's relational capacity as impeded

by violence and highlights their continued ability to build friendships. However, the role of children in group programmes as both the helped and the helper is insufficiently theorised in literature on family violence interventions for children (see, for example, Sek-yum Ngai et al., 2009; Yoder, 2003). Beetham et al. (2019) uses the concept of 'relational recovery' to underline the importance of children's relational capacity, but stops short of how children use this relational capacity to become support providers to one another.

Children's programmes (unlike women's programmes) are rarely considered to constitute a mutual aid model, where support is reciprocally sourced from and received by other children in the group (Cameron, 2002; Kelly, 2003). When the concept of 'mutual aid' is used, is tends to be only in relation to addressing what services deem to be troubling behaviour shown by children or young people (Sek-yum Ngai et al., 2009). In *Kids in the Middle*, however, children did describe a mutual aid dynamic. Children's relationships to one another within the group developed beyond simply playing, or learning together, and instead functioned as sincere emotional attachments, just as we might expect from adults. According to the children, these relationships involved listening to one another, accepting one another, and showing kindness to and encouraging one another. Finally, even when these relationships were in their infancy, children felt a commitment to actively investing in them because of the 'helping' roles they automatically took on in relation to their participation in a group.

To us, it seemed that children felt the potential value of their wisdom and input was being discounted simply because they were children. Their desire to return to programmes in a different capacity suggested they wanted to have the chance to support others to get the same gains that they felt, and have the mutual benefit of this recognised more explicitly. In chapters three and four, children expressed their understanding of some of the apprehension, fear, or uncertainty that new child clients might feel at the beginning. They wanted to offer support to them in a way that was deeply impactful and significant. This contrasts with the general portrayal of children's and adolescents' motivation for engaging in group support initiatives in the literature (e.g., Sek-yum Ngai et al., 2009; Wing, 2000). Children's stories highlighted how they perceived their own participation at Refuge. Arguably, they felt this had instilled them with much to offer others, and so envisioned various forms of a tuakana/teina relationship as providing a mechanism for them to do so. We suggest that there is a need to broaden our conceptualisation of what children can mutually offer each other. *Kids in the Middle* shows that children can and do contribute purposefully to one another's meaningful participation in family violence programmes, and experience both the 'giving' and the 'receiving' of this mutual support as gratifying.

In many ways, children's desire to support others was inextricable from their development of 'self'; their priorities were grounded in the values they ascribed to themselves. Capitalising on this desire for mutuality in practice, however, would necessitate a radical change in practice approach. It would require an engagement design that meant contact being sustained beyond the culmination of a programme or safehouse stay, and the extension of children's collective participation. At the same time, it represents the potential for innovative and impactful ways of working with children that nurture and maximise their incredible capacity to *give* support, rather than just to access it.

AFTER – SETTING

Children access Women's Refuge with their protective parents. At the same time, children's immediate social contexts, their emotional and cognitive processing, their capacity to cope, and their felt sense of belonging, comfort, and safety are neither separate from nor solely reliant on their protective parents. As with all children, kids accessing Refuge are dependent on the decision-making of adults, and this both precedes and extends beyond their time at Refuge. Adult decision-making can represent both risk and safety to children's lives. Their 'before' Refuge experiences are oriented by the perpetrator's behaviour and by the protective parent's response to that behaviour. In their 'during' experiences, children showed acute awareness of their reliance on their protective mothers – they knew that their Mums needed support, and that the support for Mum benefited them in turn. It then naturally follows that in children's 'after', both the decisions of the perpetrator and the decisions of the protective parent influence the child's setting of risk, safety, and need. *Kids in the Middle* posits that the balance of 'direct support' to children versus 'supporting mothers to support children' is central to effective children's advocacy.

The inextricability of these is testament to the need for a dual specialism - child specialist and family violence specialist. Children are clients in their own right and have their own needs, *and* their safety and wellbeing is contingent on their mothers' parenting capacity, parenting authority, and parenting resources. Protective parents do not generally lack parenting ability, as is so often assumed (Mandel & Wright, 2017). Research into mothers' parenting skills during or immediately following violence against them has shown they score more highly on indicators of parenting strengths than parents who have not experienced violence (Casanueva et al., 2008; Lapierre, 2008; Tailor et al., 2015). They most proactively protect their children's safety from violence even when at risk themselves (Wilson et al., 2015). Rather, their capacity and authority to parent is actively undermined by patterns of violence that entrap them and constrain their access to personal, social, and practical resources, even when living separately (Wilson et al., 2015; Thorburn & Jury, 2018).

These constraints have direct implications for children. As evidenced in chapter four *('After')*, children's transitions to new settings after their involvement with Refuge are influenced by their mothers' parenting capacity and, equally, by the ways this parenting capacity is restricted or sabotaged. Accordingly, children demonstrated their understanding of how their fathers' behaviour shaped their present contexts (and anticipated futures), as well as how their mothers' were able to offer them security. A strengths-based understanding of protective parenting offers

a counter-narrative to the traditional 'failure to protect' paradigm, and recognises the skill and tenacity required to prioritise stability for children (Mandel & Wright, 2017). Children's transitional setting as they leave Refuge must therefore be as purposefully assessed and supported as their transitions into the Refuge setting are.

Advocacy in this second transitional phase is premised on identifying both the strengths and the risks presented by every adult who holds decision-making power. Like children so often signalled in their interviews, their safety is heavily dependent on the safety of their mothers, but they remain plagued by worry about the behaviours of their fathers. As Mandel (2009) argues, perpetrator influence over children's care may be legally, socially, or emotionally binding, even when it threatens children's immediate or future safety. Just as this influence on children's settings is sustained well beyond children's time with Refuge, so too must children's access to support be sustained. The protective parent, even when utilising all available strengths and strategies, may not have the social or legal power to circumvent the perpetrator's control or the consequent impacts on children (Wilson et al., 2015). Advocates, on the other hand, may use their specialist role to give visibility to the perpetrator's violence and its impact on the child's new setting (Mandel, 2020), and build the protective parents' parenting capacity before, during, and after violence.

In chapter four ('*After*'), children's perceptions of safety were simple: being with Mum feels safe; worrying about when they will see Dad does not feel very safe. The use of targeted practice frameworks may aid the identification of both the violence and the protective responses to it. The Safe and Together model, for instance, draws on a specialist understanding of violence and the societal norms that disguise it, emphasising how gendered norms minimise the parenting strengths of mothers and obscure the violence perpetrated by fathers or father figures (Mandel, 2020). Explicit acknowledgement of the insidious family violence dynamics that collectively constitute a pattern of violence *and* of everyday maternal protectiveness are rare even amongst the child welfare and family violence fields (Buchbinder & Birnbaum, 2010; Stark, 2002; Sullivan et al., 2001). Clearly, a single-specialism approach does not sufficiently serve children. Instead, child-centred approaches must be threaded with the expert understanding of the family violence specialism. This duality equips practitioners to tailor their support in response to the safety and risk that protective caregivers and perpetrators respectively pose to each child's setting.

Advocates are an example of adults that make decisions for and about children, just as children's parents do. Their decisions impact children's lives, either through the immediacy of temporary direct support or through structural advocacy regarding children's transitional settings. To give the

greatest effect to this dual specialism, advocates must partner *with* the protective parent *for* the child, in order to:

- Advocate for ongoing safety and ongoing perpetrator accountability, using their skills as dual specialists to make explicit the pattern of violence;
- Counter the impacts of the perpetrator's pattern of violence on the child's setting before, during, and after their time at Refuge;
- Identify the parenting strengths of the prospective parent and how these support children's safety; and
- Promote the protective parent's social and systemic stability, as pivotal to the child's social and systemic stability.

The proposed refinement of the core function of specialist services for children in the aftermath of family violence reflects a principal and overarching *Kids in the Middle* conclusion: children impacted by family violence must be supported by services that are simultaneously child-centred and family violence specialist. As our literature overview highlights, there is a dearth of nationwide and consistent services providing child centred, family violence specialist support. This is a significant gap and one which precludes children's access to support, to safety, and to recovery.

AFTER – SELF

As we introduced in the previous section, children's transitions from Refuge into their new (or back into their old) settings need to be considered in relation to their caregiving landscape. Equally important, as signalled in children's stories in chapter four (*'After'*), is children's assessment of their own preparedness. Noble-Carr et al. (2020) suggest that consultation with children about their service experience is integral to the evolution of service design. Accordingly, we argue that to be child-centred, we must continuously invite children's evaluation of their own satisfaction with services and listen to their appraisals of their overall support. For example, children discussed their concerns about not having sufficient opportunity to practice the application of skills that were introduced at at Refuge. Of particular concern to children was the transferability of safety strategies to contexts outside of Refuge. Children explained the overwhelm they felt when given the responsibility to enact safety plans without authentic practice opportunities.

Children's stories of what they learned and what they felt constrained their learning at Refuge prompts us to consider what a successful intervention entails from children's perspectives. They offer a basis for (child-led) indicators that could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of child advocacy (Noble-Carr et al., 2020). For example, as discussed in the 'before' section of this chapter, children emphasised that the supported development of their emotional expression was positive for them. Their caveat is that the benefits derived from this learning are limited if at the end of their Refuge experience, they are not confident that they have discussed topics of importance to them to an extent they feel comfortable with. Evaluating child advocacy based on children's own insight may therefore involve capturing children's own contentment with their learning. It may also involve evaluating whether there are adequate mechanisms that continue to support children's emotional expression and application of learning outside Refuge. In short, evaluation should capture the transferability and practical applicability of children's learning. This repositions the 'burden' of learning and the translation of this learning to real-world situations to sit with Refuge rather than children.

Children's role in evaluating their support after Refuge is therefore not solely about the quality of the service they received, but also about the extent to which they feel 'ready' to transition. As they demonstrated throughout the entirety of this project, they are able and willing to give feedback regarding what has or has not worked well for them. As such, they are best positioned to lead the evaluation of their own transitional readiness, and to give input into what they believe they still need in order to thrive outside of the Refuge context. Rather than evaluation as a single-stage,

retrospective opportunity for input, we argue that evaluation should be woven into the support provided to children. Vitally, just as women have the opportunity to participate in decisions about how and when their Refuge support finishes (Walsh, 2019), children's input should be sought when assessing their need for continuing care after they transition. In the next section, we set out how this input can shape children's emotional experiences of leaving Refuge.

AFTER – OTHER

Friendships with other children within Refuge were hugely influential and important. Many children described the deep friendships they made and pointed out the reciprocal nature of these. Most highlighted the relative ease with which they made these connections. Children recalled the kindness they encountered, which contrasted with their fearful anticipation of hostility and their numerous past relationships with children who could not understand their circumstances. The importance of children's friendships in service settings in the aftermath of violence is established in prior literature. Both Beetham et al. (2019) and Pernebo and Almqvist (2016) found that their participants experienced support from, and valued the connections with, their peers throughout their family violence programmes. However, their recollections of the positive feelings associated with their newly formed 'best friendships' were tempered by their equally painful memories of the loss of these friendships. The significance of peer relationships and children's need for continuity of these must therefore be considered in their transition out of Refuge services.

In both *Kids in the Middle* and Beetham's et al. (2019) study, children underscored their sense of loss when their group participation ended, with the final group session identified as especially distressing. *Kids in the Middle* children suggested ways to extend their time at Refuge so they could extend their relationships with other children. They offered creative options for this continued engagement, such as returning to group programmes in an 'expert' capacity to pass on knowledge and champion newcomers, or to have phone calls with children they shared their Refuge experience with. This was consistent with Pernebo and Almqvist's (2016) findings, based on children's (aged four to six) reflections about their friendships. They reported often missing other children, thinking about them after the completion of their programme, and imagining possible ways of getting back in touch with them (Pernebo & Almqvist, 2016).

Children in *Kids in the Middle* alluded to feeling blindsided by the realisation that their friendships would be ending. The elation they felt at successfully completing a programme was then marred by this permeating sense of loss, followed by intense feelings of grief. These feelings were not purposefully explored with children at the time; nor was there any apparent mechanism through which the continuity of those friendships would be supported. To the children, this represented a double bind of connection and upheaval. They had found genuine support and begun to forge relationships premised on shared experience, and then were stripped of these almost as abruptly as the original upheaval that had brought them to Refuge. Their sadness remained evident as they described eventually realising the temporary and transitory nature of the connections they

made, and their awareness of how little power they had to be self-determining about the future of those friendships. We suggest that just as adults find peer support instrumental in their recovery from violence (Richardson & Moses, 2016), children clearly derive immense personal benefit from collectively generated support and social capital. To them, these peer connections *are* the foundations of their relational safety. Building a focus on relational continuity through children's advocacy, such as by resourcing and supporting the continuation of children's newly forged relationships with their peers, is therefore integral to children's satisfaction with their support. In the next and final discussion section, we examine how other relationships can undermine this relational recovery, and the onus on advocates to actively work with this potential.

Also influential in children's experiences of after Refuge were their fathers. Dad, despite being the chief instigator of the chain of events that culminated in children's access to Refuge, was only minimally referenced during children's interviews. However, while children's fathers did not *explicitly* feature in many children's stories, they were implicitly featured as the bedrock of children's fear, uncertainty, and apprehension about the future. Accordingly, our understanding of the role of 'Dad' in children's experiences of support is oriented by:

- children's perspectives of risk and violence;
- their portrayal of Dad in their lives;
- the exclusion of Dad in children's group programme discussion; and
- the role of the State in shaping children's caregiving landscapes.

In chapter two ('*Before*'), the 'setting' section underscores children's awareness of their perpetrating parents' violence. They demonstrated a nuanced understanding of what (and who) had catalysed 'risk' within their households, and how this precipitated their upheaval in pursuit of safety. This is to some extent unsurprising – like primary victims, children's lives are frequently disrupted by a perpetrator's pattern of violence. Bancroft and Silverman (2002), for instance, catalogued many of the ways that a perpetrator's tactics of abuse can de-stabilise children's security. These included tactics such as 'changing the rules' and creating an unpredictable environment, playing favourites and modelling manipulative behaviour, intentionally disrupting routines or times of family togetherness, unsettling children's relationships with their peers, withdrawing emotional or financial resources that facilitate children's social participation, and encouraging children to blame their mothers for any family separation.

Clearly, children are harmed when a perpetrating parent makes the decision to use violence against them *or* against their safe, protective parent (Murphy et al., 2013). However, despite the

cascading consequences of the perpetrator's actions on the lives of children, the design of support services often renders the perpetrator and their decisions invisible. As Mandel (2009) argues, services for children in the aftermath of their exposure to violence rarely focus on the perpetrator and their continued role in the child's life.

In their interviews, children's stories of Dad were conspicuous in their rarity. Interestingly, as demonstrated in chapter four *('After')*, children's references to their fathers appeared less coherently integrated into their stories and less easily described by them than their mentions of any other key characters (other children, mums, staff). Children depicted their fathers as fun, as dangerous, as caring, as violent, as a source of loss, grief, love, hope, and fear. Working with children who have a 'dad character' must therefore involve navigating children's often amorphous, changeable, and highly individualised characterisation of their fathers. Mandel (2017) argues that while children did not ask for perpetrators as parents, they are a permanent fixture in children's lives and minds even when physically separated. They state:

> *"Despite advances in our understanding of how violent fathers impact their children, we are still in the youth of our understanding, and the infancy of our ability to tackle with focus, energy, and sophistication the complexity of [perpetrators] in their role as parents and co-parents… It is often easier for professionals working with battered women and their children to avoid rather than confront the combination of relief, anger, sadness, and loss that burdens many children who have to flee from an abusive parent… [but] while it may be simpler to exclude the father or define him simply as the 'bad guy', we do children a disservice by not helping them work through their complex feelings about a violent father."*

We did not ask about Dad specifically in interviews with children. Similarly, children's reflections of their participation in programmes suggest that they received little invitation to delve into their associations with their fathers. Yet if these complex relational ties are not made visible in support work with children, we neglect children's needs to speak about, make meaning from, and resolve their often contradictory, poignant, confusing, and compelling cognitive and emotional associations with their fathers or father figures (Bagshaw, 2007; Callaghan et al., 2018). Constraints on time, space, and/or service design may make it difficult to purposefully explore children's perceptions of dads. This poses innumerable potential pitfalls for children's ongoing recovery. This may also be constrained by systemic factors such as formalised care arrangements. We suggest that advocates' confidence to explore the concept of dad may be strengthened by the development of practice strategies to guide this (Mandel & Wright, 2017).

At the time of interviewing, many of the children had ongoing contact with their fathers. For some, this was part of a court-ordered arrangement, despite their obvious anxiety about seeing their fathers. For these children, the *legislative* setting is as integral to the backdrop of their stories as the setting of violence in the home. Historically, this violence has been considered separate to direct risks to children's safety (Crossa et al., 2010; Murphy, Paton, Gulliver, & Fanslow, 2013; Saunders & Oehme, 2007). However, the conclusive (and continually growing) body of family violence literature attests to how the perpetration of violence causes harm both to the primary victim *and* to the child, even after the perpetrator and victim have separated (Kaspiew et al., 2017; Tolmie & Gavey, 2010; MacMillan & Wathen, 2014).

While the last decade has seen incremental legislative and practice changes, justice actors in legal matters concerning children only variably employ a family violence-informed approach (NCIWR, 2021). Our understanding of 'advocacy' with and for children must therefore also encompass systemic advocacy. This is of particular import when considering how court decisions that are not family violence-informed preclude children's safety from perpetrating parents. In particular, the non-physical manifestations of violence and different ways these disrupt the the daily functioning of the child's caregiving and household are rarely accounted for in the Family Court (Mandel, 2009). In short, the Family Court is not sufficiently family violence-informed to consistently recognise the implications on children's caregiving landscapes.

This is attributable to several systemic issues, such as inconsistent screening for violence, the limited scope of family violence evidence that must be mandatorily considered by judges (NCIWR, 2021), insufficient training for children's lawyers and judges (Gollop et al., 2020), and no mechanism to introduce expert interpretation of family violence information (Thorburn & Jury, 2018; NCIWR, 2021). A report prepared for the Law Foundation recently found that for many primary victims, making care arrangements through family court was "made even more challenging for parents and caregivers by ongoing abuse, harassment and breaches of protection orders by the other party" (Gollop et al., 2020 pp. 12).

Much of this continued abuse and harassment is not prosecuted or admitted into proceedings (Thorburn & Jury, 2018). These dynamics of perpetration and victim responses are often concealed, are difficult to name, and are intricately woven into the children's caregiving landscape. Child welfare expert David Mandel (2017) examined state actors' responses to parenting situations in the aftermath of family violence, and concluded that perpetrating parents' abuse is rarely acknowledged as causing continuous harm to children after separation. Without

this information, and without the specialist resources to give meaning and context to what that information signifies for the child's caregiving landscape, many children end up with care arrangements that mean they are spending time alone with the abusing parent (Tolmie & Gavey, 2010; Gollop et al., 2020). Accordingly, children's imagined projections of the future alluded to their preoccupation with exactly that outcome – time with their perpetrating parent in the absence of their proximal safe parent. Children's persistent preoccupation with potential risk signalled their insight into the perpetrating parent's pattern of violence. Their perceptions of the likelihood of further violence (and risk) are equally as discernible in their narratives as their recollections of past violence.

The Family Court's default to shared care then represents a severe limitation on how effective temporary support can realistically be for children. Responses to children's experiences of violence can mediate the likelihood that they will experience adverse impacts, *if* these give children meaningful gains in safety (Kaspiew et al., 2017). Crucially, these responses must include protecting children from the impact of the perpetrator's actions and, relatedly, from the opportunity for perpetrators to use their access to children to continue the violence (Mandel & Wright, 2017). As observed throughout chapters two and three, children did not appear to situate their exposure to violence as solely historical or as a series of discrete events, but rather as an *ongoing cycle* that traversed their past experiences and their imaginings of the future.

In sum, children's needs extend beyond offering them an alternative environment in which they can cope, seek comfort, and access safety. At the same time as they relax into feelings of relief, they are looking to the dangers on the horizon. There is no period 'before', 'during', or 'after' Refuge where they are wholly unburdened by their complicated characterisations of Dad and by their preoccupation with the risks he may pose in the future. To futureproof their feelings of relief and offer them a chance at accessing a sustained sense of safety for themselves, we must target our advocacy by:

- attending to children's conceptualisations and characterisations of Dad/perpetrator;
- making explicit his violence whilst honouring both their desire for continued connection and their grief that this is necessarily constrained; and
- targeting our advocacy to introduce a family violence specialist voice into decision-making about children's caregiving landscapes.

Children's (family violence specialist) advocates are arguably best placed to safely seek children's views on their own caregiving experiences and care arrangements and to advocate for the

prioritisation of these within court and multi-agency settings. While integral at any stage in children's journeys, this form of advocacy is particularly vital as children prepare for their transitions 'after' Refuge.

CONCLUSION

The five findings chapters are threaded with minor specific insights that correlate to minor recommendations. Rather than revisit and theorise these, we chose to focus the discussion on how these may be woven together to guide service *approaches*; the perspectives, skills, contexts, and imperatives that (have potential to) correspond to positive and sustained change. How we think about children, our perceptions of their capacity and capabilities, the extent to which we are attuned to them, and our knowledge of their needs, backgrounds, and future settings shape how well we can support them.

Even with the best of intentions, it is easy for adults to inadvertently look past children's expression of their thoughts, feelings, or experiences. Effective support means flipping the paradigm to centre children at the heart of service design and delivery. Our service approach must be purposeful at every phase – from 'before' the child's introduction to Refuge, until after the 'after' of their engagement with Refuge is concluded. It must be purposeful for child engagement, and purposeful for the family violence setting that so powerfully influences each child's individual past, present, and future context. A service approach (and individual practice approach) that centres children within these settings must be child-centred and family violence specialist.

Values and Implications

Kia ora kids! This is a section we are really excited about. We use this bit to explain everything you told us so we can set out a plan for how future staff and future services might use your ideas. The plan is to get everyone thinking of what you need before they meet you. We also need services and staff to have your back no matter what you are going through. Even if they don't see you much we want them to be working hard for you behind the scenes!

You told us to prepare the staff, to prepare the spaces, to make sure things are easy to understand, to show you around, to make sure you know the place is yours. We have come up with five values and a roadmap which will hopefully help others to understand how to support you and your safe people in the best way! We think these will help keep staff on track! No matter what, you can keep telling us how you like things and how well we are doing with listening to you and working with you.

VALUES

"Take care of our children, take care of what they hear, take care of what they see, take care of what they feel. For how the children grow, so will be the shape of Aotearoa" - Dame Whina Cooper

Women's Refuge are grateful to have the wisdom and support of Sheree Ryder (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Ranginui), our Mātanga Whakawhanake Māori (Māori development specialist). Sheree came on board as the research was nearing its completion. She associated the findings of the research with five distinct values which took shape through her analysis of the voice of each tamaiti. This next section is an exploration of the kōrero the researchers shared with Sheree to consider how the voice of the participating tamariki gave rise to the conceptualisation of these values, and how they can support and frame the recommendations and practice implications. As this research was completed by two Tauiwi researchers, the inclusion of this section can help to link knowledge and thought with a culturally embedded conceptualisation of the implications of the research, however it cannot compensate for the lack of resourcing towards an embedded Te Ao Māori approach from conception to conclusion of the research process.

The values are a complementary exploration of the research findings and can be woven together to provide a different lens from which to understand the meaning of tamariki voices. Enacting these values for each tamaiti means supporting them to grow within themselves, even if their contexts bend and bow. These same values cut to the heart of the mindset shift we experienced through this research process; they guide us to work with our senses awakened in a mana-enhancing way. They help us to fill the kete of tamariki with matauranga, where that energy then flows outward from Refuge following each tamaiti on their journey long after they depart our physical spaces. Sheree likened the kaupapa of the research and the elevation of tamaiti voice throughout to a tamaiti positioned as the rito, cradled in the centre of the harakeke. Many elements need to come together for the rito to thrive; in this we need to act with tika and pono to do what is true and correct in our practice with each tamaiti, allowing them the opportunity to be the version of themselves they are proud and confident to be.

The values are a gift for partnering with and preparedness toward working with tamariki.

Te tapu o te tamaiti

Acknowledging and understanding the sacredness of a tamaiti and using this to ensure the wellbeing of the tamaiti is paramount.

In Te Ao Māori, tamariki are considered a gift from atua Māori and from their tūpuna. Their connection to both divinity and whakapapa meant they are regarded with the utmost respect, as taonga, both precious and sacred. The very arrival of a tamaiti is seen as a powerful representation of spiritual connection; arriving from the dimension of the atua, they bear the traits of their tūpuna. In their ability to transcend realms, and advance lineage, we realise that every pēpē born is a gift. They are each a gift of divine creation carved from Papatūānuku, representing a connection to souls who have passed on, a way to remember whānau, and an opportunity for another life to flourish.

Tamariki are sacred - they are taonga - and as we prefaced, deserve every protection, opportunity, and form of support that Women's Refuge can offer them. In our purposeful focus on supporting their Māmā we may not have given ourselves space to pause to consider them and their sacredness. By hearing their voice, we have been afforded the opportunity to view them in a more complete way, and in doing so understand the broader picture of who they are.

Their sacredness may have diminished through the exposure to the harmful behaviours of others, behaviours which they, their Māmā, and other safe caregivers cannot control. In the stories of our tamariki, the perpetrator had seemingly lost sight of the sacredness of their tamariki. Our 19 tamariki are deserving of ongoing nurturance, care, and protection. However we rarely, if ever, heard that they had been prioritised by their perpetrating parent.

Embodying the physical, relational, and structural environment that envelops a tamaiti honours their sacredness. For Refuge, striving to recognise each tamaiti as taonga begins by sketching a vision.

Sacredness looks like tamariki playing, laughing, and sharing. It looks like insatiable curiosity; it looks like loving embraces; it looks like relaxation and comfort. It looks like tamaiti being prioritised and being recognised as the important and unique group they are. It looks like inclusion, with their journeys connecting them to environments that nurture their development and growth.

Recognising each tamaiti as taonga feels like the freedom for tamariki to express themselves, and the freedom of knowing that their ideas and contributions will be met with an affirming and

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warm response. It feels like the absence of shame. It feels like understanding their positioning within their whānau, their hapū, their iwi. Sacredness affirms the role of tamariki both as valuable contributors and as those who need to be protected.

Sacredness sounds like sitting under blankets listening to the wise and exciting kōrero and mōteatea of whānau and hearing their own voices in amongst those of their peers and their elders. Sacredness sounds like representation.

Sacredness smells like the anticipation of a fresh catch, and it smells of hāngī being prepared. Sacredness tastes like a full puku, and a safe place to rest and digest.

Upholding sacredness for a tamaiti looks, feels, sounds, and smells like safety – it is Āhurutanga. Our tamariki describe their ideal environments as those which enable complete safety by allowing them to create meaning and coping, and to begin their recovery from within their warmth and comfort.

Whanaungatanga

Relationships for tamariki are encouraged for growth and development

The disconnect and upheaval these tamariki describe upon their arrival at Refuge was met with an abundance of felt emotion. As common strands stood out in the stories of tamariki, they began to weave these into a larger story of connection with one another. Commonality was progressively identified and built as tamariki were brought together by a similarity of context and situation. Unfortunately, family violence was the kaupapa that had shaped their upheaval and their subsequent transition into a largely unknown and confusing space. Violence had bought the tamariki together, to be in each other's environments, and in each other's lives.

Demystifying their environments was the kaupapa whānau: a way of experiencing connection and unity, that evokes a sense of whānau, regardless of genealogy. For our tamariki, it was the kaupapa whānau of Refuge that began to link their experiences, knowledge, opinions, and ideas to those of all tamariki who had passed though Refuge spaces, and to all those who are still on their way to Refuge. This inherent understanding of each other's experiences uniquely positions them as experts, and as capable of growing and developing meaningful relationships and connections. Tamariki spoke about the bonds they created with other tamariki, and the significance of their flourishing friendships in their lives.

Tamariki found relational comfort in the solidarity of Refuge's kaupapa whānau. They were immediate champions for themselves and for other children. It was obvious that they did not want the disconnect they had felt upon arrival at Refuge to be repeated in the severing of these friendships and reciprocal relationships found in this kaupapa whānau. To ensure their connections were not lost, they created ways of holding fast to those who meant a lot to them in their journeys. Tamariki deserve support to ensure the value and meaning they drew from the connections they worked so hard for can remain with them, even when they transition into new physical and relational spaces.

Koha mai, koha atu

Allowing for the tamaiti to share and receive in a way that is best for them

Our tamariki have proven that they are expert advisors within this research process, and as such their voice alone is able to instruct us on what will benefit them the most. As we support tamariki as ngā rangatira mo āpōpō, we contribute to them, see their strengths blossom, and support them to do the same for others in return. Many of their stories involved their desire to be both supported by Refuge and to provide support for the countless 'other' children they imagined still needed help. These tamariki gifted Women's Refuge with koha so bountiful that it will take the collective effort of our 40 Refuges to return to them something as meaningful, impactful, and enduring.

Koha mai is receiving and koha atu is giving back. It is not necessary for the giving and receiving to be constructed in the same way, represent the same thing, or be an exact exchange of energy, time, thought or value. It is however, always given with the intention of reciprocal benefit.

Many tamariki signalled that they wanted to share their new insights, and knowledge to mentor other, newer tamariki on their journeys with Refuge. Our tamariki showed that they did not have to stop and consider their worth in the sharing, giving, and receiving of koha. They did not need to contemplate if they wanted to share, if they could share, or how their contribution would be received by others. They simply believed in the exchange, believed in the continuity of support, and understood the value of what they were able to offer. If Refuge continues to provide an appropriate relational and structural environment, this can continue to happen naturally.

Whakapapa

Tamariki are encouraged to explore all aspects of who they are, growing their sense of identity and belonging

Many of our tamariki travelled hours away from their homes with their Māmā to reach their temporary destination of Refuge. They describe leaving behind so much - their bonds to their homes, communities, friends, whānau, treasured possessions, and perpetrating parents. In leaving everything behind they felt loss and grief, although experiencing simultaneous relief.

For Refuge, it is essential to consider whakapapa and the bonds to people, places, and things of import for our tamariki. We should not consider any of these links as broken, just necessarily stretched or changed in this time and space. We can create safe ways of exploring whakapapa with tamariki, ensuring connections remain intact for a safe moment of exploration and reconnection. It is up to Refuge to create environments where this is welcomed; tamariki cannot be cut off from knowing, being, and feeling the entirety of who they are. Pāpā, and the multiple characterisations of Pāpā, that tamariki storied may not be physically present in their lives, but the other dimensions of their connection to him should never be severed.

In honouring the sacredness of the tamaiti we empower connection with safe caregivers, and we support the interconnection of learning that happens for both Māmā and tamariki while with our services. We should support the recognition of the strong wāhine who have acted protectively throughout constrained and often impossible circumstances. In Te Ao Māori, collective nurturance may look like a village collaborating to raise a tamaiti, everyone with differing but vital roles. When we are looking at a tamaiti at Refuge, we can consider who and what their village consists of. This village may be their siblings, their wider whānau, their advocate, their counsellor, their school - all needing to be guided in the same direction, and each one catering to an important aspect of the needs of the tamaiti.

Te mana o te tamaiti

Acknowledging that each tamaiti possesses strengths in their own ways

Completing the interviews with tamariki kanohi ki te kanohi determined that their voice, ideas, and opinions were not only valid, but essential. Their words, their questions, their inquisitiveness, and their curiosity were all respected and included. Meaning was bought forth from every part of the stories they told, and from all of the interactions they shared. The phrase 'looking back to move

forward' means closing our eyes and opening up our mental vision to see children safely included in processes, tikanga, and issues that concern them. It means thinking about which parts of Te Ao Māori, especially the positioning of them as valued and sacred, can be drawn on to support tamariki today. Similarly, this recognition of mana or strength of every tamaiti means recognising that their contributions are inherently meaningful, and not lesser simply because they are younger.

The participating tamariki held a sacredness that was unquestionable. Testament to their strengths were their contributions, their selfless narratives, their ownership over new spaces, and their personal power and development. They have spirit; they are champions; they are brave; they harnessed their innocent voices to share meaningful kōrero. Nothing is more important than their unaltered voice, except our undivided attention to hearing their meaning as they use that voice with its original integrity, and not as we wish to interpret it. Otherwise, their words will drift on warm air pockets out to sea for the toroa to make sense of.

Helping to realign our position of children as a sacred group means shifting our practice views. The unspoken assumption that 'if Māmā is safe at Refuge, then so are her tamariki' does not go far enough to acknowledge children as deserving of safety, protection, and advocacy as clients in their own right. Practices that intentionally and thoughtfully centre tamariki are an integral part of our commitment to honouring all tamariki as sacred.

Glossary

Āhurutanga – warmth, comfort

Hāngī – food cooked in an earth oven

Hapū – subtribe, kinship group

Iwi – tribe, extended kinship group

Kanohi ki te kanohi – face to face, in person

Kaupapa – topic, matter for discussion, subject

Kaupapa whānau – kinship group brought together by common theme

Kōrero – to tell, say, speak, talk

Mana – strength, power

Matauranga - knowledge

Mōteatea – lament, traditional chant

Ngā rangatira mō āpōpō – leaders of tomorrow

Papatūānuku – earth mother

Pēpē - baby

Pono – be true, authentic

Puku – stomach, abdomen

Tamaiti - child

Tamariki - children

Taonga – treasure

Tika – to be correct

Tikanga – correct procedure, custom

Toroa - albatross

Tūpuna – ancestors, grandparents

Whānau – family group

IMPLICATIONS

At Women's Refuge, children feel safe. They draw from what we offer to create a sense of belonging for themselves. They use the physical and relational environment to derive comfort, and this then constitutes the basis for how they cope.

At Women's Refuge, children learn. They grow, they contribute to others, and they feel proud of their achievements. They connect with advocates. They remain close to their Mums, and they and their Mums begin to piece together the foundations for a safer life.

These are powerful impacts. They are testament both to the effort and investment of kids and their Mums, and to the effectiveness of the support provided to children at Refuge at present. *Kids in the Middle* consequently looks toward the future. We focus particularly on how the infrastructure of support for children may be strengthened so that more of the benefits to children are enduring, rather than temporary. If we use children's voices to enhance their 'before' and 'during' (their entry to and participation at Refuge), they may experience greater safety in their 'after'. Building this safety for their 'after' begins with how we conceptualise children in our services.

Children are our clients. They become so because they, too, are victims of the violence that is perpetrated against their protective parent. Children do not experience the perpetrator's violence in isolation, and may never even directly witness it. They are nevertheless equivalently impacted by the way a perpetrator's patten of violence undermines the safety of their caregiving landscape, and this may be perpetuated during and beyond the physical separation of their parents. The impacts of perpetrators' violence on children's lives and on the functioning of their families and households must therefore be reflected in the way that services are set up for children, as well as for their mothers. On the other hand, children's protective parent is typically their greatest source of safety, and will continue to be the basis for their safety and stability long after they leave Refuge. Services for children must be both specifically targeted to children *and* integrated with the specialist support provided to their mothers.

Successfully delivering a service with a dual specialism (children and family violence) is predicated on extending our expert analysis of family violence to the experiences of children. Working with children after they have lived with a perpetrator's violence requires the expert exploration of the perpetrator's pattern of behaviour in relation to every aspect of the child's setting before, during, and after children's time with or at Women's Refuge. Only by keeping children's

experiences *as victims* at the forefront of our design and delivery of Refuge services can we fulfil our potential of duality: a *child-centred* and *family violence specialist* service.

Below, we make recommendations based on the collectively constructed story of children's experiences before, during, and after Women's Refuge. We start with a bullet-pointed list of the various practice implications that emerged from this collectively constructed story, and then show how these fit together to give emphasis to the child's journey at Refuge. In keeping with the theme of 'continuity' that underpins this research, we have sketched a visual depiction (*Figure 4*) of how children's journeys may be best supported by dual-specialist children's advocacy. As we suggest above, children are not simply passengers in the journeys of their mothers. Their experiences are simultaneously associated with, and distinct from, the experiences of others. The practice implications below therefore span the entirety of children's journeys with us, from before they come to Refuge until after their involvement has ended.

From the first moment they hear of Refuge (their 'before'), children are forming an iterative expectation of what our involvement might mean for them and for their families. It is then up to us to demystify our service, to proactively add colour and context to children's anticipation, to give information that is specific to and appropriate for them, and to build their confidence in us and our responsiveness to them. These initial impressions of Women's Refuge are pivotal.

'During' children's time with Refuge, their satisfaction with the support they receive is dependent on our capacity to consider each individual child's perspectives, experiences, memories, preferred communication styles, and emotional articulation, and to be purposeful in our every response. That means a whole-of-service response in addition to a dual-specialist advocate response. By giving visibility to children's meaning-making, coping, comfort, safety, relationships, learning, positions within family, and systemic settings beyond Refuge, we can reduce children's mental workloads as they relate to skills acquisition and applicability.

All of these considerations must similarly be used in preparation for children's 'after'. They are masters of their own progress, capable of giving both input and feedback regarding their own transitional readiness. Giving permanence, transferability, and sustainability to the benefits that children experience through Refuge is premised on our involvement of their mothers, on our enduring focus on the perpetrator's pattern of violence, and on how we prepare for children's 'after' contexts in partnership with children themselves.

Kids in the Middle demonstrates the need for responsive services for children to:

- Use an evidence-informed practice approach that prioritises children's needs
- Reflect the services commitment to them as clients within the environment
- Purposefully prepare spaces that engender safety, comfort, and coping
- Encourage ownership over spaces
- Separate learning spaces from play spaces
- Balance children's 'mental workload' with having fun
- Have lots of kai for sharing
- Encourage children's friendships
- Individualise the experience for children
- Provide multiple methods for theory integration
- Provide ample opportunity for practical application of safety plans
- Check children's comprehension of learning and skills
- Check children's confidence with learning and skills
- Evaluate learning and confidence
- Recognise and discuss the multiple 'dad characters' in children's ongoing lives
- Incorporate children's mother and safe and protective caregivers into the design and delivery of children's support
- Assess outcomes for children

Kids in the Middle suggests that child advocates need to be:

- Supportive of children as clients in their own right
- Champions for children before they meet them, and after they leave service
- Aware that children have been differentially impacted by their experiences prior to Refuge
- Welcoming – warm tone of voice and demeanour
- Understanding of the equivalence of children's emotions
- Able to reassure children that other kids and Mums are nice and friendly
- Able to truly listen to, teach and facilitate children
- Friendly and able to have fun
- Able to balance fun with learning elements of Refuge
- Able to situate every interaction with children as purposeful
- Aware of the importance of play in aiding comfort and meaning for children

- Familiar with the ways children find a sense of comfort, coping, and safety
- Able to encourage relational safety and mutual aid between children
- Able to initiate difficult conversations openly and non-judgementally
- Provide information to children in child-appropriate ways
- Able to speak about the perpetrator's pattern of violence and how this has impacted and constrained children's safety, wellbeing, and household functioning

To embed a dual specialism approach, child clients need a dedicated:

- Intake process
- Ongoing consent process
- Transparent information package
- Risk assessment
- Multi method induction to physical and relational aspects of Refuge
- Safety planning
- Evaluation of efficacy utilising children as service users

Kids in the Middle finishes with the road map of a dual specialist children's service on the following page, which reimagines a (strengthened) whole-of-service approach to children. Children (and their mothers) make a leap of faith when they decide to access Refuge. They leave much of their lives, they try hard to trust that being at Refuge will give rise to better outcomes, and they make themselves vulnerable to the people supporting them. As they so beautifully demonstrated throughout their participation in interviews for this research, this *does* offer them safety, comfort, and growth.

In this concluding chapter, we have set out how we might enhance children's experiences to give these greater sustainability and continuity. That begins with our conceptualisation of children as clients in their own right. When we regard *all* children having contact with Refuge as a discrete and vital client group, services can be designed for *them,* and equivalently targeted to meet *their* needs - from before their 'before' until after their 'after'.

"Like if he were a caterpillar and went through the metamorphosis and emerged a butterfly"

Figure 4: Roadmap

Appendices

APPENDIX A – LITERATURE BACKDROP

Kia ora kids! Here, we write about why it is important to talk about family violence and kids at the same time. We looked at what kids around the world think about the staff they have met, and the programmes and services they have been in. We needed to know what other kids thought before we could ask you to join in with this research. It seems kids want to talk about what happens at places like Women's Refuge.

At the moment, in New Zealand there is no national service that is just for kids to help them if there is violence at home. We need somewhere for kids to go even if they live right down the bottom of Te Wai Pounamu, or right up the top of Te Ika-a-Māui. We hope this is something we can help with. We already have lots of space for kids, we just needed to talk to you to see how we could make those spaces better for more kids and Mums across the country.

Introduction

Children's experiences of family violence are equivalent to those of their mothers and require an equivalently purposeful and targeted response. Family violence is a gendered issue with women and children almost exclusively represented as victims of harm (Fanslow & Robinson, 2011). Children have historically been invisibilised as victims, although they too suffer from the detrimental impacts associated with family violence (Beetham et al., 2019). Women's Refuge statistics show that for the 2019-2020 period, children made up just under 50% of clients who accessed safehouses across the country. However, Women's Refuge client data also shows that children only made up 8% of the total number of clients seen by Refuge.

There may be several reasons that the data shows inconsistencies between the number of children accessing certain services and the overall number of children supported at Refuge. Women's Refuge has differing requirements for data capture if a client is residing in a Refuge dwelling, or in private or alternative accommodation. Similarly, advocacy may be occurring with children in the community, but it is viewed and recorded as advocacy for a mother as the primary client. Regardless of the reason for the differences in data, the numbers show a stark contrast in how Refuge services record and document children, and the level and type of advocacy that is available for them. There appears to be a dissonance in the way children and their mothers are viewed as clients; if children are viewed as equivalently deserving and in need of support then services will be better placed to understand, respond to, and provide for their specific and individual needs. This overview aims to understand how children are viewed, both in child specific research and in services that cater to children, in order to capture how children's experiences can inform practice.

It is only in the past two decades that children have been included in research on family violence (Beetham et al., 2019). This is due in part to the perceptions of, and contentions around, safely managing children's experiences of sensitive research (Cater & Øverlien, 2014). There is limited research both internationally and in Aotearoa that captures children's experiences of family violence and support seeking from the perspective of children. This limits the use of their experiences to inform practice. As the awareness and understanding of children's experiences of family violence and its associated impacts becomes more comprehensive, it becomes necessary to commit to appropriately responding to children's needs. Here, we explore how researchers and practitioners consider the way children conceptualise their experiences and what they need from helping agencies through the exploration of extant literature.

By detailing the prevalence and impacts of family violence for children, we will explore the physical, emotional and developmental impacts as well as the impacts on family functioning and reduced parental capacity. Children's specialist knowledge is examined in relation to how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provided a basis for researchers to include children as participants in sensitive research (McCafferty, 2017). Lundy's (2007) model of child participation was developed to ensure researcher responsibility to utilise information from children to advance their participation in the design of interventions concerning them. However, this is not universally applied; the extent of children's involvement in the conceptualisation and design of interventions tailored to them remains variable. Current research explores children's views on their inclusion in decisions made about them, what they see as important when accessing support, and their inclusion in creating and obtaining outcomes. Lundy's (2007) model will be used to frame the discussion of the appropriateness of support available in New Zealand that caters to children's specific and individual needs. A limitation of Lundy's model is the minimal guidance around its use in a culturally specific context, there is currently no evidence of its appropriateness or effectiveness when working with tamariki Māori. Although, it is less of a process driven model, and more of an outline to ensure that children's rights are upheld when adults mine their knowledge.

Prevalence issues and context

The term family violence not only aligns with current language used in the Family Violence Act 2018, but importantly recognises that children, as part of families, are impacted by violence that they may be exposed. Internationally, family violence is a pervasive issue - one in three women report experiencing family violence. In New Zealand with the inclusion of psychological violence that number rises to 55% of women who have ever partnered with a man (Fanslow & Robinson, 2011). These women are often the primary caregivers of children, meaning that children are impacted both directly and vicariously following violence perpetrated against the women, who are often simultaneously their main source of safety (Wilson et al., 2015). The prevalence and impacts of children's exposure to family violence will be discussed from the perspective that child abuse is a parenting or caregiving decision by a perpetrating figure.

It is difficult to get a true picture of the prevalence of family violence as it is often unreported (Fanslow & Robinson, 2011). This is especially true for children, who as dependents, often rely on others to report on their behalf. For this reason, many statistics on children will not accurately measure prevalence. Murphy et al. (2013) grouped data from various sources, finding that

children were present in half of police callouts for family related harm. Furthering this, the New Zealand Police found that children are the direct victims of violence in 70% of households where family violence is perpetrated. In care and protection services, family violence is present in over 60% of cases (Murphy et al., 2013). Clark et al. (2009) surveyed a cohort of secondary school students finding that almost 50% had been exposed to psychological violence, and 16% had been exposed to physical violence with 12% reporting they had been physically harmed themselves. It is clear from this data that child abuse directly resulting from family violence is a pervasive issue in New Zealand.

Impacts of family violence on children

It is now well recognised that the exposure of children to any form of family violence constitutes severe child abuse (Saunders & Oehme, 2007). This is whether children are directly physically harmed, witness physical or emotional abuse within the home, or are not directly present but aware that abuse is happening (Gregory et all., 2019; Kitzmann et al., 2003; MacMillan & Wathen, 2014; Wolfe et al., 2004). Children are innocent bystanders in this process where perpetrating figures (often fathers and stepfathers) make parenting decisions that impact children's immediate and future outcomes (Murphy et al., 2013). The perpetrators' choice to enact violence within the home is a caregiving decision that directly places children in harm (Wilson et al., 2015). It impacts household functioning by limiting the mothers' capacity to parent safely and without constraint (Crossa et al., 2012). There is also evidence that child maltreatment and sexual abuse frequently co-exist within families where violence is perpetrated (Crossa et al., 2012; Murphy et al., 2013). Family violence therefore impacts children's opportunity for unimpeded physical, social, and emotional development and wellbeing.

Aside from the immediately discernible impacts of family violence - including physical injury (Clark et al., 2009), and fear (Cunningham & Baker, 2007), there is a plethora of severe and devastating effects on children. These are dependent on the frequency and length of exposure to family violence, but regardless are impactful to children and their individual experience of violence. Family violence outcomes are categorised below as physical, emotional, and social and developmental to detail the deleterious consequences for a child.

Physical impacts can include issues with sleeping and eating (Bragg, 2003), complex brain trauma (Perry, 1997), and poor overall health (Cunningham & Baker, 2007). Emotional impacts can include confusion and powerlessness (Cunningham & Baker, 2007), anxiety and depression (Cunningham & Baker, 2007), poorer mental health outcomes including hospitilisation (Ingram et

al., 2020; Orr et al., 2020), and self-harm and suicide (Bragg, 2003). Lastly, social and developmental issues can lead to difficulty forming secure attachments and building relationships (Mittal & Carrington, 2012), issues with identity (Harrison, 2008), and normalisation of violence (Cunningham & Baker, 2007). This is by no means an exhaustive list; however, it signals some of the potential consequences for children living with family violence. These impacts can leave children with a sense of loss, including loss of identity, childhood, relationships, trust, confidence, independence, and safety (SAMHSA, 2017). Accordingly, it is necessary that children have tailored services to address their needs based on the complexity and variability of impacts from exposure to family violence.

Research highlighting adverse childhood experiences (ACES) shows that children who are exposed to family violence are at risk of having poorer future outcomes than those who are not exposed. This research also importantly provides an explanation of protective factors which can decrease the likelihood of poorer outcomes at an individual, familial, community and government level (SAMHSA, 2017). These protective factors may include the quality of the child's relationship with their non-violent, protective and attentive parent; a sense of community; and policies and laws that provide protection from other risk factors to children such as racism, poverty, and substance abuse (SAMHSA, 2017). It is useful to focus on how service responses to children's experiences of violence can mediate the likelihood that they will experience adverse impacts (Kaspiew et al., 2017). Crucially, these responses must include protecting children from the impact of the perpetrator's actions and relatedly, the opportunity for perpetrators to use their access to children to continue the violence (Mandel & Wright, 2017). Responses must also support the relationship between children and their safe, protective parent (Mandel & Wright, 2017).

It is therefore important that practice, research, and policy is cognisant of the varied and pervasive impacts of family violence on children and applies targeted responses that strengthen these protective factors. Children's programmes will benefit from considering physical, emotional, and developmental impacts, as well as familial and structural impacts, when developing and facilitating work with children. In addition, this work must also be informed by the voices of children themselves, which is discussed next.

Specialist knowledge - The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

It is only in the past two decades that children have been engaged in participatory research on family violence. This aids in understanding children's experiences of support seeking, especially as they navigate adult dominated, adult specific services (Campo, 2015; Mullender et al., 2002). The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), of which New Zealand became a signatory in 1993 (Manaakitia A Tātou Tamariki, 2020), paved the way for researchers to incorporate the voice of the child into topics of a sensitive nature, such as family violence (Cater & Øverlien, 2014). It establishes a necessary social contract giving children the right to both protection and to participate in matters that impact them (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006). New Zealand maintains regulatory processes to ensure that new legislation sits within the scope of the Convention (Ministry of Social Development, 2020).

Article 12 of UNCRC determined the importance of children's rights by recognising their capacity to articulate issues, regardless of their age or perceived ability, experience, and maturity (Freeman, 2007; Thomas, 2007). An implication of Article 12 is the consideration of children as competent social participants, with the ability to consent to and give meaningful and necessary input into research and practice. Children's inclusion in research facilitates child-generated specialist knowledge, advancing knowledge and decision-making pertaining to them. This offered the potential for a depth of knowledge that was previously ethically unadvised.

Analysis of children's participation and protection

The balancing of children's participation and protection needs to be prioritised by all researchers, policy makers, and communities of practice (Kennan et al. 2019). Although Article 12 was almost universally endorsed, the divergence from standard practice was deemed controversial (Lundy, 2007). This principally concerned the balance between viewing children as social actors who are capable of participation in research and practice, and the desire to protect them from the expectation that they engage with content that may be traumatic or distressing (Lundy, 2007). Therefore intervention processes need to balance the potential harm associated with participating alongside the potential benefits.

There is a multitude of studies showing that contrary to the belief that children's participation inevitably causes further harm, the omission of children's perspectives and experiences can be even more detrimental. Article 12 states that children need to be genuinely heard (Manaakitia A Tātou Tamariki, 2020). Research exploring the inclusion of children's voices suggests this is not

reliably prioritised by social workers (see Kilkelly et al., 2005; Munro, 2011). These studies present the salient finding that children's views and preferences about their care were rarely sought, and this was what children expressed as most problematic.

Research into how children experience support from specialist family violence agencies demonstrates similar findings that illustrate how children are disempowered. Firstly, there was inconsistency in social workers' abilities to fully include children in social work processes. Children felt they had little influence over their ability to inform decision-making and create change for themselves as social workers struggled to view children as capable social participants (Eriksson, 2012). Secondly, children felt they were not given adequate information to understand their role within family violence services, detracting from their sense of agency (Bowyer et al, 2012). These experiences led to a loss of control, independence, trust, and safety for children – arguably antithetical to the purpose of the support.

Conversely, there is consensus within the social work literature that fully involving children in decision-making positively impacts them. Participation increases the likelihood that children will invest in the process and in their outcomes (Bell, 2002; Cashmore, 2002; Halvorsen, 2009). Children reported that when practice makes their contributions explicit, support is better tailored to their needs (Mason, 2008). This has dual implications for practitioners: children's participation increases their buy-in, while disallowing participation impedes progress toward outcomes. Therefore, this corresponds to the ethical imperative that opportunities for children's participation are safe and meaningful, i.e., their contributions will be heard and applied in practice. The meaningful application of children's contribution was also emphasised by Lundy (2007), whose model is discussed next.

The way children's input is practically incorporated into research or service delivery must be an equivalent focus to the process through which their input is sought. Without a mechanism through which to attribute value to children's participation there is the risk that their input will be applied in a superficial and tokenistic manner (Kilkelly, 2005). In 2007, Laura Lundy created a model of participation to conceptualise Article 12 to promote children's right to full participation (McCafferty, 2017). Lundy (2007) argues that the obligation of a researcher or practitioner does not end after a child has engaged or given input. Instead, they proposed a four-step participation process. The first three steps are: giving children 'space' to freely express themselves; enabling children to share their 'voice'; and truly hearing children while being an active 'audience'. The fourth component is 'influence', which represents an onus beyond traditional conceptualisation of the

child's voice, instead requiring their voices to be acted upon. Considering 'influence' in family violence research and practice is particularly essential given the likelihood that children may need additional reassurance about possible outcomes for themselves and their families. The effort and energy they spend participating, and the personal risk involved needs to be met with adults' genuine commitment to action.

Children's insights into beneficial practice

The inclusion of children's voices in research communicates to them that they are both important and influential. Noble-Carr et al. (2020) completed a meta-synthesis of children's experiences of family violence and related support. It was found that children were easily able to articulate their experiences of violence and support they received. The following section details children's responses from several studies that determine what help children feel is important. Of importance to note here is that extant literature is international, there is a distinct lack of Aotearoa specific, or indigenous research on children's experiences of help seeking.

Beetham et al. (2019) captured the perspectives of children, aged 7 - 10, who completed an 8-week family violence group programme and highlighted three principal themes in what they perceived to be effective support. The first was a need for 'fun' to be incorporated. The second was the facilitation of opportunities to build relationships with peers. Notably, the third was embedding children's right to decide how and when they attended and engaged with programmes. Children required both sufficient and appropriate information prior to starting with regard to participation expectations and content, and what support was available when the programme concluded. The salience of choice is particularly stark here; programme design needs to be attentive to children's choices and how they exercise power over their lives at every stage.

Often, support for children concludes when a programme finishes. This contrasted with children's expressed desire for support to be maintained as the impacts of violence were enduring (Bowyer et al., 2015). They often have limited choice about how programmes offer continuing support, and this was then manifest in children's constant worry about the future for themselves and their families (Stanley et al., 2012; Swanston et al., 2014). Their sense of safety is reliant on both their physical and emotional needs being met, which occurs variably in programmes (Mullender et al., 2002). Offering choice about ongoing support and ensuring each of these needs are met could enhance children's experiences of support-seeking. When physical and emotional safety needs were provided for, children felt an enduring sense of safety and happiness (Swanston et al., 2014).

Many studies concluded that practitioners who work in programmes need to be highly skilled in family violence as well as child centered care (Bowyer et al., 2015; Buckley et al., 2007; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012; Swanston et al., 2014). This was beneficial for children as they felt that safety was only achieved when practitioners could confidently speak about sensitive content in age-appropriate terms. For example, many children spoke about their fathers not always being 'bad', and many implied positive associations of Dad (Callaghan et al., 2018). Practitioners need to be comfortable having challenging, family violence-specialist conversations. Children participating in Beetham's et al. (2019) study offered tips for practitioners; namely: 'be kind', 'be calm', 'actually listen to us', 'treat us age appropriately', and 'plan activities for us so it is not all talking'. Children as participants in research can give valuable information about what helps them as participants of family violence practice. The themes that children raise around choice, safety, relationships, and practitioner requirements help services to design, develop and implement services. As per Lundy's (2007) model of participation, each study discussed in this section had recommendations for practice specific changes that advance children's safety and support. The final section of this overview therefore focuses on how this relates to services in New Zealand.

Current Aotearoa services

The historical deprioritisation of children as victims of violence has meant that services have been oriented towards women and mothers. Eriksson and Appel Nissen (2017) identify one of the issues with children accompanying their mothers to adult centric spaces; namely, that outcomes, growth, progress, and goals are all tailored to adults, and accordingly children are less set up to be supported in these environments. In Aotearoa, various service providers support children after family violence, however there is the need for child specific services where children are offered support equivalently to their mothers. This overview has shown that children identified the need to have staff, and services who are both child-specialists, family violence specialists, and who understand the cultural and social significance of children as clients. It is apparent that targeted support is required for children on a national level, especially considering the impacts and prevalence of family violence on children and their families.

A scan of the landscape of services that children and their mothers' access in the aftermath of family violence revealed that specialised service provision for children remains a current gap. There are child-centred generalist services, women-centred generalist services, women's-centred family violence services, services who target support to Māori, Pasifika, and Asian women, and

services who provide dual-specialism but with limited geographical scope. There are currently no services in Aotearoa with the required dual-specialism, who are cultural responsiveness, and have support and resourcing for national service coverage.

The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges, as a nationwide family violence specialist service with 12 Māori whare, and one Pasifika fale, have the potential to cater to this gap in service provision. While the design of Women's Refuge services are predominantly oriented toward women, there is capacity for a simultaneous child-centred approach to be supported. This is evidenced by the running of child services in half of the forty affiliated Refuges.

Conclusion

This overview aimed firstly to present the prevalence and impacts of family violence on children as equivalently deserving of attention as those of women, and secondly to explore the need for and use of children's voice within social work research and practice. The extant social work literature demonstrates children's abilities to articulate their needs, and the appropriateness of seeking their input was codified by Article 12 of the UNCRC. In the wake of variable application of Article 12, Lundy's (2007) model of participation conceptualised how children's voice should be safety sought and embedded. Research into children's perceptions of their participation shows that promoting children's choice and opportunities for meaningful input gave them a sense of power over their own outcomes. Conversely, exclusion from decision-making or design led to a sense of powerlessness.

This use of voice must then be considered in the context of family violence services for children. Analysis of themes within the body of international research into children's perceptions of accessing support leads to the following conclusions: that privileging children's voice begins with collaboratively building children's understanding of what support looks like for them prior to it starting; that feelings of safety can only be accessed if both physical and emotional needs are identified and catered for; that support is most effective when the mutual-aid potential of peer relationships is fostered; and that for optimum safety, services and their practitioners must be family violence specialists, child-centred, and culturally safe. However, few services are equipped sufficiently.

The resourcing and prioritisation constraints that organisations may face preclude their capacity to design and deliver services that privilege both the family violence specialism and the child-centred specialism whilst having an overall lens of cultural safety. Practice development could

include investing in the strengthening or expansion of existing services such as Women's Refuge to build capacity for dual specialism nationally, that is guided by specialist use of children's voice. Correspondingly, there is a clear need for Aotearoa-specific research into children's complete experiences of support following family violence exposure to explore what they find useful, meaningful, and affective, and how this can be practically applied to guide service development. *Kids in the Middle* provides a response to the gaps in literature and provides the first purposeful exploration of children's experiences as told by children in Aotearoa.

APPENDIX B – METHOD

Kia ora kids! This section may not be very fun for you, but it is an important section to let everyone know how we set up this research and how we made sure you were safe all the time.

We talk about how we found you all and how your Mums helped us with that. We let the adults know about the different activities we did together, like all the awesome drawings you did! Lastly, we explain how we thought about your ideas, and the type of questions we asked you so that we could get your feedback for our research goals.

Introduction

To explore how children are currently supported and identify possible improvements, we sought to find out more about how children understand their Refuge involvement, how they demonstrate coping, which aspects of support they find meaningful or useful, and how they feel that support for children could be expanded or improved. To do this safely and using a method that aligned with our values of privileging children's voices and children's meaning-making, we used narrative inquiry to guide our data collection and analysis. Contact with children was preceded by a lengthy consent and consultation process, which involved navigating multiple gatekeepers to introduce additional protective layers to our eventual engagement with children. Below, we describe our research protocol, and highlight the ways that we centred the safety and wellbeing of children throughout.

Epistemological and methodological stance

One of Women's Refuge cornerstone values is feminism. While there are multiple and overlapping branches of feminism, each emphasises the need to honour women's contributions within society and recognise the social and structural dynamics of power that shape their experiences. Given that Women's Refuge works with gendered violence against women, our feminism makes visible the influence and reach of perpetrators in the lives of women and children. The aim of this research was to understand children's experiences of being supported by Refuge services, aligning with the feminist emphasis on elevating historically silenced or marginalised voices. Children's historical de-prioritisation as both victims of family violence and users of family violence services needed to be countered with a methodological approach that centred their stories, experiences, and needs. Our design of children's engagement was therefore informed by the contemporary body of evidence regarding children's participation and expression in research and practice (see Cater & Øverlien, 2014; Eriksson & Näsman, 2012; 2018; Houghton, 2015), in recognition of children's rights to give their input in ways meaningful to them.

Given these aims and commitment to promoting children's meaningful input, we used a qualitative approach (specifically, narrative inquiry) to encourage children's expression of their stories and experiences. Narrative inquiry aided several research imperatives: to honour our awareness of children's capability to contribute; to privilege the stories of those who are often excluded or silenced; and to portray children's own descriptions of their individual and social experiences, allowing for children's meaning-making and interpretation of their truths (Wang & Geale, 2015).

Recruitment

Children were selected via convenience sampling, which presented the dual benefits of easily accessing children who might want to take part and could do so safely and the ethical rigour that this enabled through important gatekeeper roles. Advocates working for Women's Refuge were made aware of the research and recruitment criteria, and offered an indirect contact method that supported participants' potential to give free and informed consent. Advocates reached out to the mothers of children who were:

1. Between 5 and 13 years of age;
2. Currently supported by Refuge;
3. Not currently living in a household where violence is perpetrated; and
4. Considered able to understand the research aim.

Nineteen children from nine family groups were interviewed. Of these, eight children were Māori and eleven were Tauiwi, and ten were girls and the remainder boys. Each family group was interviewed twice, with the exception of one who was interviewed once (Rose and Elijah) due to scheduling conflicts.

	Participating children								
	5yo	**6yo**	**7yo**	**8yo**	**9yo**	**10yo**	**11yo**	**12yo**	**13yo**
Boys	Elijah Reggie		Jax Evan	Tai Kauri Ambrose	Ihaka Hunter				
Girls		Emma	Rose Aaria		Charlotte	Kaia Awhina Kahurangi	Ana	Isla	Leila

Figure 1: Spread of child participants' ages.

Ethical overview

Ethics approval was granted by NCIWR's internal ethics committee, comprised of an equivalent number of Māori and Tauiwi members. The ethics review and approval process functioned as an essential safety mechanism that had oversight of anticipated risk and proposed mitigation strategies, encompassing risks of harm to participants, to their mothers and whānau, to their wider communities, to Refuges and staff, and to the researchers. As part of this, we created a twelve-step consent process to minimise the potential risk to children and their whānau (see Eriksson & Näsman, 2012). This included two layers of gatekeeper approval. The first was from women's advocates, who needed to have confidence in the integrity of the research process before extending the invitation to participate to whānau they supported. The second was from children's mothers, who were the non-abusive, protective, attentive parents for each participating sibling group. While gatekeeping has been problematised by other authors (for example, Savage & McCarron, 2009) as limiting researchers' access to data, we perceived this gatekeeper role as both protective and conducive to children's safe participation.

The consent process followed these 12 steps:

1. Advocates were informed about the research with written information and a phone call.
2. Advocates consented to supporting the research process.
3. Advocates identified potential families based on their knowledge of a family's current situation.
4. Advocates spoke to identified mothers about the research and gave verbal and written information to mothers.
5. Mothers informed children of the research and consented to children's involvement.
6. Children gave consent to their mother.
7. Advocates gave the researchers the mothers contact details.
8. The interviewer contacted the mother and gave verbal information, clarification, and answered any questions or concerns.
9. The researcher and mother organised an initial interview with children.
10. Children met with the researcher and decided if they wanted the mother and/or advocate present for their interview.
11. Mothers signed the consent forms.
12. Children were given age-appropriate verbal and written information about the research and are shown the three consent tools in order to inform their consent questions and decisions - 'confidentiality booklet' (Appendix C), 'consent booklet' (Appendix D), 'stop sign' (Appendix E).

Data collection

After a child gave initial consent, the researcher reiterated that the child was under no pressure to participate and could retract consent at any time without any repercussions (see Chapter One, *'Consent'*). We viewed consent as an ongoing process shared between the researcher and child rather than a fixed agreement. The interviewer's use of consent tools introduced consent concepts, and educated children on their rights while they were participating. They also aided the researcher's observations of children's demonstrated ability to decline participation or establish conditions and boundaries around their participation. The use of child appropriate tools to explain and observe consent created an environment where they were able to challenge perceived power dynamics, or renegotiate these until they felt comfortable (Coyne & Carter, 2018). Age-appropriate information offered children more control over the direction and speed of

conversations, meaning they were better able to lead their own interview experiences (Coyne & Carter, 2018).

This research intentionally focused on children's experiences of Refuge services rather than their experience of exposure to violence. Accordingly, we planned data collection methods in ways we hoped would minimise any potential distress to children regarding the sharing of distressing or sensitive experiences. Children were not directly asked to speak about violence, but were from the outset made aware that they were chosen to participate because of their exposure to violence.

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each family group (with the exception of one group) to explore children's experiences of Refuge services. Each interview lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. Interviews were conducted either at Refuge offices, safehouses, or at children's homes, depending on children's choice and the availability of space. Not only were these environments relevant to the children's lives (Punch, 2007) they also allowed children to have control over the space and relational setting, such as by the presence or absence of advocates and parents during interviews (Robinson & Kellet, 2004). Utilising Refuge spaces in particular encouraged children's comfort with the process and supported their memories of specific Refuge experiences. A flexible question schedule (example Figure 2), that focused on how children experienced Refuge, was utilised alongside several creative arts-based methods (drawing, poetry, character creation), offering children the opportunity to determine their preferred method of participation (Hadfield et al., 2005). These facilitated and encouraged discussion and exploration of the interview content. The combination of questions and creative art-based methods were 'experience' focused, as opposed to 'event' focused, giving children control over what and how they shared their experiences. This afforded them autonomy over the construction, content, and pace of their storytelling (Andrews et al., 2008).

Example questions:

'What is/was your favourite part about Refuge?'

'If you were the boss here what would you change?'

'Can you think of the best place for children, what would that look like?'

'How do you think [character] feels before/during/after Refuge'

'How do you think other kids felt on their first day?'

'Could you draw me a picture of how you feel now, after Refuge?'

'How would you want kids to feel when they left Refuge?'

Figure 3: Examples of interview questions.

Creative methods can encourage children's enjoyment of the research process, offering multiple ways for children to communicate their ideas (Coyne & Carter, 2018; Salvin-Baden, 2007). These catered to the participants' varied ages (5-13), abilities, and personalities, and minimised the need for children to confidently speak with adults or other children. Creative methods helped to establish children's ownership of the process; they understood their art to be a valuable contribution. This individuation of children's participatory preferences made storytelling accessible for a range of styles of expression that children might align with.

We used both audio and video recording in the interviews; a decision supported by narrative inquiry principles. Video recording focuses on children's realities and captured non-verbal or nuanced interactions alongside participants words (Punch, 2002), supporting adult researchers to bridge the gap between their adult affinity and the child's reality (Buchwald et al., 2009). We believe this helped us to hear the stories within and between children's narratives.

Data Analysis

As only one researcher conducted the interviews, video recording provided a way to involve the research team in the observation of the interview process for analytic purposes. This process supplemented the use of transcripts to enhance the narrative inquiry process (Salvin-Baden, 2007). Since the qualitative interview itself is unable to be replicated, data recording is integral to determining which aspects of interviews can be returned to for analytic purposes (Tessier, 2012).

It captured (and helped researcher recollection of) the singing and dancing, the kind gestures between siblings, the supportive mothers, the concentration, the thought and the effort, the laughter and delight, the serious and pensive times, the gratitude, and the overall excitement. Children enjoyed being the stars of their interviews; video recording was familiar and predictable for them, and increased their comfortability with the process (Noyes, 2004). It also gave children the opportunity to review their participation and have pride in their contributions.

We adapted a version of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space narrative inquiry process for interviewing and analysis (Figure 3). The three-dimensional space structure sets out three principles of inquiry: interaction, continuity, and situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These collectively offered a method of meaning-making within internal (personal) and external (social) contexts. In their structure, analysis of interaction comprises both the personal experiences of the participants and their interactions with others (Wang & Geale, 2015). Continuity examines the past, present, and future experiences of the participants, and situation considers how participants' specific contexts impact and give meaning to their narratives (Wang & Geale, 2015). Clandinin et al. (2015, p. 24) state that "within this space, the experiences of participants and researchers animate temporality, sociality, and place".

We used this three-dimensional space narrative structure to explore the *continuity* of children's temporal experiences 'before', 'during', and 'after' contact with Refuge services. Continuity was examined in relation to the interaction of children's personal and social perspectives, and their child-specific settings. This emerged as a central theme and as such was an ideal basis for our organising structure. Vitally, the attention to continuity recognises that children are living continued and evolving stories (Salvin-Baden, 2007). Using an adapted narrative structure allowed us to develop a deeper understanding of both the journeys children experience in the aftermath of violence, *and* how Refuge services play a role in these – children's journeys do not start or end with our involvement. The analysis of continuity, interaction, and setting allowed us to identify gaps and successes in service, and to associate children's ideas for an improved service experience to every step of their journey with Refuge.

Analysing and presenting data according to children's stories over time in relation to settings, self, and character underscores the complex interplay between their descriptions, experiences, and suggestions. For us, this was underpinned by our purposeful collaboration with children before, during, and after interviews to fully involve and centre each participant in our process. This offered more than children's comfortable engagement; the participant-interviewer dynamic then

functioned as a simultaneous source of data. The co-creation of stories between children and interviewer complemented those told by the children individually and those created between siblings during their interviews.

Our sustained focus on relationships and continuity emphasises the ethos of this research *and* the ethos we hope is discernible in our presentation of our findings. Our attention to ethically engaging with children in *Kids in the Middle* demonstrated the value of emphasising continuity from 'forethought' to 'follow-up', which later became the basis for a practice approach that we emphasise in our discussion. This mirrors the overarching imperative that we emphasise: that our responsibility to children does not begin at first contact nor cease when contact ends. Rather, this responsibility to children is continuous, and starts from before their engagement with us begins and lasts until after their engagement with us ends. The end-point of this style of engagement is in the transference of their ideas to meaningful practice change. To honour their investment and participation in the research, their contribution must be met with a commitment to embed their recommendations in how Women's Refuge designs and delivers services for children.

		Continuity		
		Before	**During**	**After**
Interaction	**Setting**	Context, environment, conditions, structures, barriers, influences in each temporal phase		
	Self	Identity, feelings, thoughts, hopes, and development in each temporal phase		
	Others	Key characters, relational construction, aid and expectations, and intentions of others in each temporal phase		

Figure 3: Adapted version of the three-dimensional space narrative structure.

APPENDIX C – CONFIDENTIALITY BOOKLET

This booklet supported the explanation of confidentiality for children, including the process the interviewer and advocate would take if children disclosed historical or current harm.
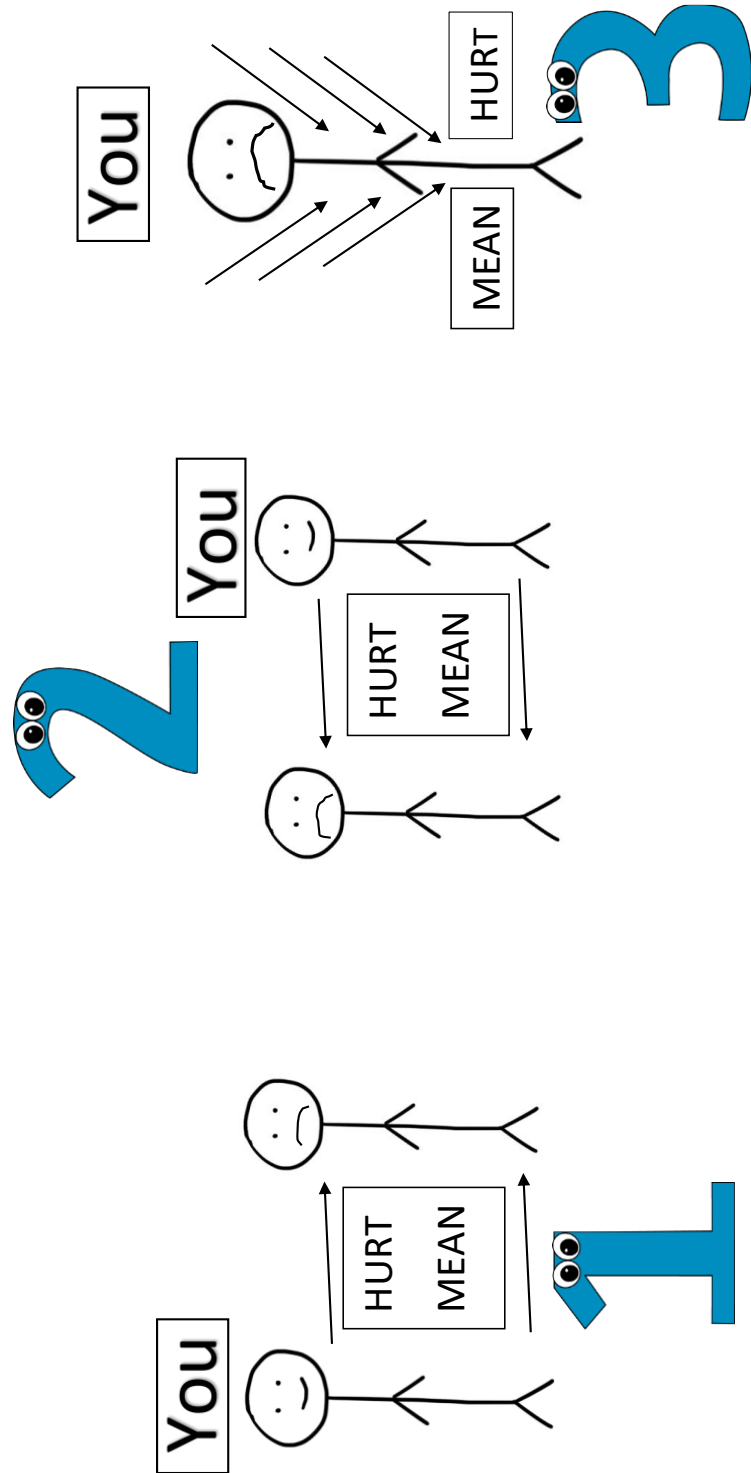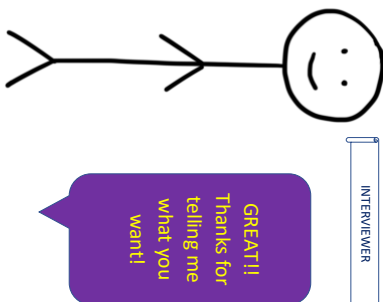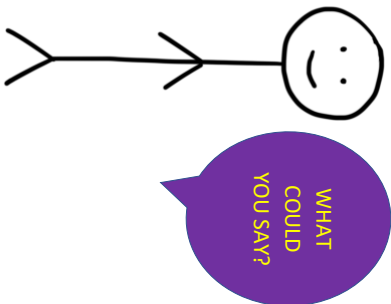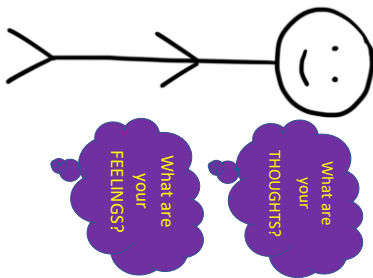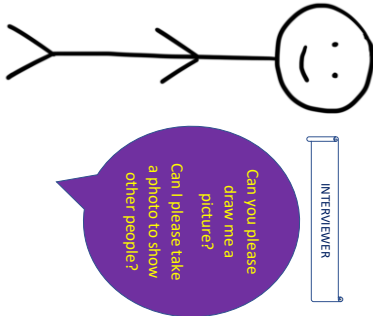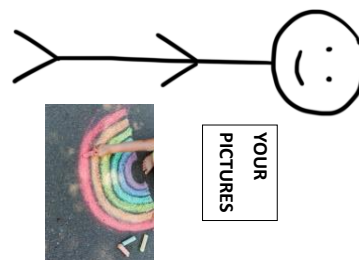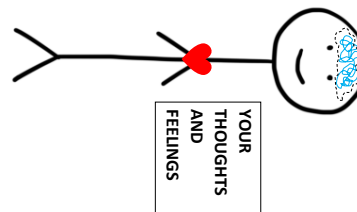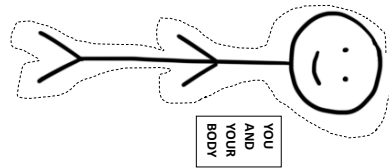
APPENDIX D – CONSENT BOOKLET

The consent booklet used pictures to depict children in an interview setting talking to an interviewer and creating art. Examples were given around the options they had to determine what they spoke about, drew, and who would have access to their information and pictures.

WHAT IS CONSENT?

INTERVIEWER

Can you please draw me a picture? Can I please take a photo to show other people?

YOU AND YOUR BODY

What are your FEELINGS? What are your THOUGHTS?

YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

WHAT COULD YOU SAY?

YOUR PICTURES

INTERVIEWER

GREAT!! Thanks for telling me what you want!

APPENDIX E – STOP SIGN

This physical 'stop sign' could be used by children to immediately stop what was happening in the interview for any (or no) reason.

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