Evaluation of Kōkihi ngā Rito

What Kōkihi ngā Rito can teach us about building safety for tamariki who have experienced family violence

WOMEN'S REFUGE

Dedication

This evaluation is dedicated to tamariki and their safe people.

[My client said] 'this is the first time anyone has ever listened to me' and I was like 'I can't promise to save the world or make all your wishes come true, but I will be sitting there telling everyone what you want'. She did end up getting her lasting wish which was to go back to her Mum and that is where she is. I am sure it has been a long like five years for her. – Kōkihi ngā Rito child advocate

Women's Refuge

The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (Ngā Whare Whakaruruhau O Aotearoa) has been providing support to women, children, and whānau impacted by family violence for 50 years. Our vision is for all women and children in Aotearoa to live free from family violence. Women's Refuge is New Zealand's largest nationwide organisation providing immediate crisis, and long-term family violence specialist advocacy to women. In 2021/22, our network of 40 affiliated refuges supported 52,000 referrals, and 59,000 safe nights in safe houses. Children continue to be represented in our client statistics, making up 54% of all safe house clients.

What Kōkihi ngā Rito can teach us about building safety for tamariki who have experienced family violence.

An evaluation of the 'Kōkihi ngā Rito' pilot implemented by six Refuges affiliated with the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges Ngā Whare Whakaruruhau o Aotearoa (NCIWR).

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Praise for Kōkihi ngā Rito

TAMARIKI ARE SAYING:

It was helpful but also enjoyable.

[KT] is my safe person; [KT] just listens and understands.

My feedback already is just this is amazing already.

I'd like to stay here for years.

I guess it feels like rewarding once you are past [the violence] because I did have to work hard to get where I am now.

[My KT] is really great, doing a great job.

MUMS ARE SAYING:

[KNR] has been the most continual support we have had through all organisations.

I couldn't have done it on my own. I genuinely think we couldn't have done it without KNR because it is a different programme that no one else offers. No one else offers what we had through here.

I don't know how, like what is the word, like express it enough how important this programme is because we benefitted so much.

I would be lost without them.

My kids love it, they absolutely love it.

There had never been a time where I thought [KT] has given up on us or hasn't pushed hard enough for all my kids.

I don't think I would be where I am today without KT truly.

For me, KNR was just bringing me back to my son and getting rid of the guilt that was keeping us apart.

REFUGE IS SAYING:

Kids voices are being heard.

There has been such a huge shift in how tamariki are valued. It has been massive.

So [KNR] was our missing link. So now our chain is complete.

I think definitely if a child is walking through that door we are a lot more child centred then we have ever been ever.

This role is so intensive and so specific and specialised.

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Executive summary

Background

This evaluation is the first in Aotearoa to draw primarily on feedback from children themselves about how individualised family violence advocacy makes them safer. It evaluates the effectiveness of the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges' (NCIWR) child advocacy pilot - Kōkihi ngā Rito (KNR).

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) funded a specialist child advocate (Kaiārahi Tamariki, or KT) in six Women's Refuge sites across the motu to work alongside tamariki aged 5 – 12 years old who have experienced family violence. These sites comprise three General Refuges, two Tangata Whenua Refuges, and one Pasifika Refuge.

Family violence represents a pervasive social disease, creating a ripple of risks and consequent impacts that spread across children's homes, whānau, childhoods, and imagined futures. Perpetrators of family violence drive two kinds of risk in children's lives: the risks *of* family violence and the risks arising *from* the family violence. The risks *of* family violence include the potential for the perpetrator to harm or kill the tamaiti or to harm or kill their Mum in front of them. Conversely, the risks *from* violence include all the ways that the family violence that has already been perpetrated leaves a negative imprint on children's lives. Family violence adversely impacts the stability and predictability of children's routines, housing, and schooling; the emotional, material, and practical capacity their Mums have available to parent them with; their opportunities to connect with people, play, process experiences, or get support; and their rights, health, and freedoms.

Tamariki represent the biggest and arguably one of the least-served victim cohorts in Aotearoa. Accordingly, Aotearoa has yet to establish and apply a benchmark for best practice with tamariki impacted by family violence. In comparison with family violence services for adults, support specifically for tamariki tends to focus much less on addressing family violence-related risks and much more on building their emotional and behavioural competencies.

Few support pathways offer a means to recognise and reverse the practical and material toll that perpetrators' violence takes from children's (and their Mums') lives, leaving the majority of related 'risk' perpetually unaddressed. Previous NCIWR research with tamariki identified many of these gaps in support provision, leading to the development of Kōkihi ngā Rito: a specialist family violence service to meet the needs of 5 – 12 year olds through a child-centred and whole-of-whānau approach.

Kōkihi ngā Rito sits within Women's Refuge and recognises children's unique needs *as children* who are impacted *by family violence* and provides a mechanism for safety within a society that is rarely attuned to or genuinely set up for tamariki.

Aim

Our evaluation sought to identify whether, how, and to what extent children are safer as a result of participating in Kōkihi ngā Rito.

Research approach and method

Women's Refuge is a specialist family violence organisation, set up by women and for women (and their children). Kōkihi ngā Rito, in subtle contrast, was set up for tamariki (and their Mums) – a subtle but significant shift in whose safety is prioritised and by whose input safety-related advocacy gets prioritised. Our first objective in the design of this evaluation was consequently to maintain the integrity of this subtle but significant shift in both method and focus of inquiry. We consequently prioritised the safety and visibility of children in two ways.

First, we designed a child-led research approach that encompassed multiple adult gatekeeper roles to ensure that genuine, ongoing, and confident consent underpinned children's participation, and that they participated in ways that worked best for them as children. Our interview process utilised tools such as board-game style questioning and fun challenges and was supported by relational and cultural safety. Second, although starting from the core assumption that emerging 'outcomes' of Kōkihi ngā Rito would relate to safety, our analysis privileged the ways tamariki themselves conceptualised safety and pivotal relationships, advocacy, and experiences of the pilot.

We used a qualitative-dominant, mixed-method research approach, informed by feminist and anti-oppressive perspectives that account for the subjective, relational, and structurally-situated ways tamariki experience family violence, safety, and support. Experiences of family violence are invariably structurally derived and imbued with feelings of powerlessness. To avoid replicating children's feelings of powerlessness or silencing, we positioned the contributions of tamariki as the principal focus of inquiry and analysis, with the experiences of Refuge kaimahi as a secondary and supplementary focus. Accordingly, we gave most attention to the qualitative data, which enabled greater conceptual complexity than the conclusions inferred by the descriptive statistics collected alongside the qualitative data.

We interviewed 10 tamariki (four Māori, four Pākehā, and two Pasifika), their five Māmā, and two Kaiārahi Tamariki. We carried out additional focus groups, which included six Kaiārahi Tamariki, six Managers, and three other Refuge kaimahi. The data from these interviews and focus groups were triangulated using a deep dive case analysis of 18 further tamariki (three per pilot Refuge). Interview and focus group recordings were transcribed and used as the basis for qualitative thematic analysis, supplemented by descriptive statistics drawn from outcomes information held on the files of KNR tamariki.

Findings

From 1 August 2021 to 1 April 2023, 126 tamariki (aged four to 14[1]) came into KNR because they were (and are) victims of family violence, perpetrated by a father or father figure. Many referred to the violence they experienced, saying *"I like him at jail because he hurt Mum," "he is not a safe person to me,"* and *"he was mean and hurt mum, he was mean to me sometimes."* They stayed in service for an average of five months, with the longest-supported tamaiti in service for 580 days. Sustained, intensive, and individualised support was identifiable for tamariki of each age within the pilot.

Tamariki involved in KNR showed markedly higher rates of lethality indicators in comparison to tamariki involved with Refuges generally. In addition, in contrast to other tamariki involved with Refuges, KNR tamariki were almost always put at risk by biological fathers who utilised statutory mechanisms to retain access to them, and who as a result had continuous opportunities to use violence against them and their Mums. Yet as a result of their engagement with KNR, they were kept safe from homicide, and, in the main, from further direct assaults. In addition, their feedback showed that KNR meant they suffered fewer losses, less psychological abuse, and less harm than they would have without KNR.

1. The KNR age bracket is 5 to 12 years old, however, data includes a 4-year-old (1%) who was engaged in KNR with an older sibling and was about to turn 5. 14-year-olds (2%) are represented as they started KNR at age 12 or under.

These snapshots of reduced risk show the following:

- Unlike children who are direct victims of family violence but do not receive long-term, individualised support, KNR kids received professional support that explored, documented, and addressed the harms and risks of family violence in their lives;
- The nature of KT relationships with tamariki enabled them to disclose many risks that would otherwise remain unknown to their Mums and to services;
- KNR tamariki had safety plans that were tailored to them, involved professionals as well as individual actions, and were effective at safeguarding them from further harm;
- KNR tamariki were better heard and understood by other parts of the systems they interacted with, so their experiences of violence could be voiced and inform safer decision-making and organisational accountability within schools, courts, and other services;
- Both tamariki and their Mums were able to access a much wider range of support and resources at the times they most needed them, as a result of long-term involvement with KNR; and
- Tamariki and their Mums experienced reciprocal benefits to their relationships and the functioning of their mutual home lives because of the recovery- and capacity-generating efforts of KNR.

Tamariki said plainly and consistently that Kōkihi ngā Rito made them safer and made their lives better. Safety outcomes are reflected in every dataset we utiliised: in the words of tamariki themselves, in the accounts given by their Mums, in the ratings tamariki assigned on their outcomes instrument (as below), in their Recordbase[2] files, and in KT reflections of KNR.

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Before Refuge:

Right Now:

Once we ascertained that tamariki were indeed safer as a result of KNR, we turned our attention to *how* they became safer. We found the answers mirrored the three-pronged approach underpinning KNR. Tamariki were made safer through advocacy that was specific to them as tamariki, focused solely on family violence, and supported their Mums and whānau as a crucial component of supporting them.

At the outset of the pilot, each tamaiti had different safe people, different whānau systems, different relationships to and contact with perpetrators, different interests, different living situations, and different abilities. They were at different stages in their journeys through violence, so they had different risks, and, of course, different needs. However, they all required and deserved safety that felt mana-enhancing, and they all required and deserved the right people – *their* right people – to be involved for them.

Unsurprisingly, these tamariki entered into KNR afraid, cautious, and very much still at risk of violence or at risk because of the impacts of the violence. Equally unsurprisingly, we found that relational safety – or the sense of attachment to a warm, affirming, responsive, reciprocal, and reliable advocate – necessarily preceded and foregrounded all other forms of safety during children's experiences of the pilot. **Hunter (12) explained that his KT "*doesn't judge, [I] never ever feel judged,*" while Corey (9) said his "*is amazing, she is very good at talking with children,*" and Manaia (8) reflected that his KT "*always had my back…she always smiles at me. She was lots of fun.*"**

Children spoke about the centricity of relational ties in multiple ways: their relationships with Kaiārahi Tamariki, their relationships with their Mums, and the relationships between their Kaiārahi Tamariki and their Mums.

Their accounts of what safety looked and felt like to them reflect the symbolism of them as the rito, encapsulated within the harakeke. The harakeke, and the three blades at the heart of it, represent the tamaiti, their parent (Mum), and their Kaiārahi Tamariki (who brought the family violence expertise to safeguard them). One Mum explained why this was paramount for children's feelings of safety, saying *"in a situation like this they need safety, security and that same consistency. [They] got offered that here."*

Another Mum reflected on the interconnectedness of her own and her son's experiences of both risk and safety because their *"wairua are always connected"*. Feeding Mums' wairua and unburdening them from the heavy emotional and practical demands engendered by the violence, therefore freed up their capacity to parent how they wanted to.

Both tamariki and their Mums pinpointed the principal gap for tamariki prior to KNR: specialist support that was both *for tamariki* and about safety *from family violence*. They identified the combination of the two in KNR as a vital point of difference – to work best for children, safety interventions needed to account for how they as children uniquely experienced family violence and safety from it.

As tamariki (and KT) pointed out, safety work needed to work for children – not for adults. As Abbie (now aged 14) put it, her KT *"just put it in a way that I understand, whereas everyone else had just said the same thing about danger, but that is too broad."* The distinction between generic services and specialist family violence service provision was further articulated by the Mum of one KNR tamaiti.

> *Refuge has a lot of knowledge on trauma and obviously domestic violence abuse, whereas if you see a counsellor they might have trauma counselling, but trauma could be like being in a car crash or drowning. Domestic violence trauma is a whole different trauma. So, I guess it is very hard to find someone that is very centred on **domestic violence trauma** and understanding what that **is actually like for children.** – Mum*

In sum, both kids' and Mums' stories showed that children's safety and nurturance reached its fullest potential when child-led, family violence informed, and whānau approaches worked in tandem with one another.

To explore how children's safety had changed through KNR, we first looked at the different ways they had been put at risk by perpetrators' use of violence. The risks we identified are grouped into five categories.

1. Risks to children's physical safety and the potential of further family violence,
2. Risks to their Mums' emotional, practical, material, and parenting capacity,
3. Risks to children's wellbeing, connectedness, and use of voice,
4. Risks to household stability, recovery, and healing for tamariki and their whānau, and
5. Risks to children's trust and faith in services to help and support them.

The nature of family violence risk varied from tamaiti to tamaiti; as did the picture of prospective safety that KNR offered them. Some common examples given by tamariki and Mums included:

- Perpetrators coming back;
- Further disclosures of threats, physical abuse, and sexual abuse;
- Emerging suicidal ideation or self-harm;
- School or peer exclusion;
- Financial hardship;
- Court proceedings;
- Further breaches of orders and intimidation tactics;
- Family violence-related strain on other whānau relationships;
- Issues with Mums' employment or access to entitlements; and
- Issues with how children's schools, appointed lawyers, child protection social workers, healthcare professionals, counsellors, supervised contact providers, and police responded to the family violence and to the whānau.

We found that KNR's consideration of family violence risk and safety allowed for radical re-forming of family violence advocacy for tamariki: combining individual, face-to-face support *with* tamariki and intervention within systems *for* tamariki.

Both relied on the application of a comprehensive and coherent risk rationale, risk assessment resource, and risk response. As one KT commented, without that new approach to risk consideration, "the kids' voices would never be heard." **Just as family violence catalysed risks across many parts of each child's life, the advocacy for them tracked and traversed those risks to respond to each one with safety actions.** Tamariki, with support from their Mums and KT, led the prioritisation of this safety work.

We found both statistical and qualitative evidence of safety outcomes relating to each of these types of family violence risk. **For example, the ratings tamariki assigned to each domain of the My Star™[3] reflect the immense gains to both a.) their safety from family violence and b.) their thoughts, feelings, and relationships.**

However, these safety gains are more powerfully illustrated by children's reflections on the role Kōkihi ngā Rito played in what safety was possible for them, their Mums, and their whānau. Ample evidence of the outcomes achieved (including gains to wellbeing as a byproduct of increased safety) through KNR is set out in the below on Page 14.

Just as family violence catalysed risks across many parts of each child's life, the advocacy for them tracked and traversed those risks to respond to each one with safety actions.

3. My Star: The outcomes star for children. My Star is suitable for children in families that are identified as vulnerable/troubled and receiving services. *Copyright: Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise Limited*

Risk category	Examples of KNR-facilitated safety outcomes
Risks to children's wellbeing, connectedness, and use of voice	• Tamariki have safe and warm relationships with Kaiārahi Tamariki and have fun memories with them; • Tamariki feel safe enough to share their experiences and disclose further family violence risks over time; • Tamariki are supported in ways that are flexible, individualised to their needs and ages, and work for them when (and how) they need it; • Tamariki lead the type, pace, and breadth of safety work and are in control of how long they get support for; • Tamariki voices are represented in contexts where others have the power to make decisions that affect their lives; • Tamariki are proud of their own successes and progress and are confident to share their achievements with people closest to them; and • Tamariki demonstrate increased self-confidence.
Risks to their Mums' emotional, practical, material, and parenting capacity	• Mums are supported as the Mums of tamariki clients; • Tamariki have improved relationships and communication with their Mums and others in their whānau; • Mums have more parenting capacity and are unburdened by outstanding material needs, immediate shortfalls in household budgets, relentless caregiving responsibilities, and excessive safety and administrative workloads; • Mums feels validated, supported, and no longer isolated; • Tamariki spend time with safe adults to give Mum respite time; Mums' wairua is replenished and they are freer from the strain of parental coping and caregiving; • Mums have a clearer understanding of how perpetrators' use of violence impacted them and their tamariki, and do not blame themselves for the family violence; and • Mums are more confident in and proud of their protective parenting and overall parenting capabilities.
Risks to children's physical safety and exposure to more of the perpetrators' violence	• Tamariki have safety plans that they feel comfortable with and are confident enacting; • Tamariki feel safe enough to disclose things that make them feel unsafe, ashamed, or worried; • Tamariki have increased confidence in enacting safety strategies, and correspondingly, reduced mental workload and risk preoccupation; • The risks to tamariki are heard in criminal and family court; • Police and Refuge work together to safeguard whānau and hold perpetrators accountable; • Services and systems (including child protection) interacting with tamariki have the family violence information they need in a format that has the most potential to assist them in their decision-making about long-term safety; and • Safer decisions about tamariki lives are being made by other agencies and systems (enabled by specialist advocacy using comprehensive information about family violence and its impacts on the tamariki and their whānau and household functioning).

Risk category	Examples of KNR-facilitated safety outcomes
Risks to household stability, recovery, and healing for tamariki and their whānau	• Tamariki have secure medium-term housing; • Tamariki understand more about violence, victimisation, and perpetration, and know they are not responsible for the violence or its impacts on their whānau; • Tamariki have a safe space and safe people to help make sense of their thoughts and feelings about their Dads; • Children's experiences, preferences, and input are recorded safely, taken seriously, and used to make their lives easier and safer; • Tamariki have an improved understanding of and ways of coping with their mental health; • Tamariki have increased awareness of and ownership over personal and whānau strengths and skills; • Tamariki have increased capability for emotional regulation and communication of needs and boundaries; • Tamariki can anticipate what is happening next, when, and why; • Kids' whānau members are on the same page about what they need and how best to support them; • Tamariki have re-engaged in school, sports, and other interests, and the barriers to their participation in these have been removed.
Risks to children's trust and faith in services to help and support them	• Kids' worries about family violence risks are heard, listened to, and acted on by people who understand family violence; • Tamariki know and trust that they can come back anytime if they are struggling or need help in the future; • Mums are aware of and confident in what Kaiārahi Tamariki are doing with and for their tamariki; • The different parts of the helping systems Mums are involved in are working together more cohesively; • The different parts of the helping and justice systems tamariki are involved in communicate more with one another; • The negative expectations children, Mums, and whānau had previously formed about helping organisations has been countered; • Their experience of KNR promoted their hopefulness about safe futures; and • Tamariki (and their whānau) know where to get help if they need it and have positive expectations of the outcomes attainable through seeking help.

Children's feedback on how KNR could be improved involved, quite simply, 'more'. They wanted more of what KT could do for them, they wanted more KT to be at every Refuge, and they wanted many, many more tamariki to have the same support from KT that they had. To them, the uniqueness of KNR was that it 'actually helped' them to be safer, and that it was specifically for them, about them, and responsive to them as unique individuals within their whānau.

Being for them, about them, and responsive to them often meant navigating unfamiliar terrain, quickly switching direction, and forging new pathways in pursuit of safety. Crucially, however, children were in the driver's seat of this advocacy, choosing where to go and when. They emphasised this often, explaining that their KT "*always made sure I felt like I could say no,*" and "*asked me if I was okay to talk about [Dad],*" and *"made it feel like it wasn't a task."*

Tamariki and their Mums shared numerous stories of advocacy that meandered, backtracked, changed, and evolved over time.

Their KT reflected that identifying the risks that children were least comfortable giving voice to was often contingent on that long-term, flexible, child-led support; without it, they believed such risks would remain unspoken and unaddressed.

Advocacy for tamariki was consequently defined more by adaptability than by design: every safety-focused action functioned as a building block, which only when layered together led to long-lasting, genuine, and durable safety from family violence. We illustrate this in the penultimate section of the findings, where we chose to depart from presenting findings by theme and instead present case studies to highlight the efficacy of continually adaptive and risk-responsive advocacy for tamariki.

Children's (and Mums') reflections on how risk and advocacy evolved in tandem demonstrate how long-term engagement nurtured, fortified, and sustained structures of safety around each tamaiti, the benefits of which outlasted the pilot itself. However, the data from kids, Mums, and KT also reveal the limitations of how effective KNR can be while the safety of tamariki is actively undermined by more powerful systems. Many KNR tamariki were failed by these systems at the most critical point in their journeys, condemning them to known, continuous, and anticipatable risk of harm from family violence. Some remain embroiled in court battles at the time of writing this report, relating to proceedings initiated before KNR's inception. These children remain at critical risk as a result.

The system gaps and oversights that further entrenched risks to children chiefly involved:

- The physical and relational environment in which children are expected to give input into decisions that affect them in criminal court, family court, and child protection services;
- Family court and/or child protection systems failing to listen to, understand, and give effect to how children experience family violence risk and safety;
- Inadequate consideration and use of family violence information in care of children proceedings, so that perpetrators' patterns of harm and Mums' protective parenting are neither recognised nor inform decision-making;
- Lack of family violence-informed responses by some police, social workers, lawyers for children, lawyers working with Mums, and family court Judges, reinforcing risks to children; and
- Undermining and underutilisation of family violence specialists working with children, precluding a whole-of-system safety-enhancing response to them and their whānau.

There was consensus amongst tamariki, Mums, and KT about the negative implications for risk and safety well beyond the endpoint of KNR; as one KT concluded, the "*biggest issue*" is system actors who "*have the power to do anything*" but refuse to acknowledge "*that family violence risk in their decisions*", leaving whānau feeling let down, betrayed, and as though the system was perennially working against their best interests.

Repeatedly encountering such risk-reinforcing responses also left KT feeling that their extensive safety work with tamariki and the skill, resources, and capacity invested in it was often attenuated by systems and system actors that were unable (or unwilling) to truly prioritise children's safety.

Discussion

Every person, service, and system that touches the life of tamariki, their Mums, perpetrators, and their whānau plays a crucial role in shaping the risks they face from family violence, and how safe they can be. In a family violence context, risk, resilience, safety, and stability are never individually built (by tamariki) or individually experienced (by tamariki). They are the ultimate result of every decision made by perpetrators, by whānau, by every service tamariki and whānau are involved with, by police, and by the courts. This decision-making is in turn oriented by unequal distributions of social and structural power, including power divides along the lines of gendered oppression and colonisation.

We therefore begin our discussion with who plays what role in risks to tamariki, and who is (and needs to be) responsibilised for their safety, followed by what these findings, alongside other studies, can tell us about how advocacy can evolve to best serve the safety of tamariki.

Tamariki did safety work of their own accord both prior to and within KNR. While children are argued to have inherent capability to make sense of their relational worlds and resist oppression, their developmental capacity and social positioning limits their use of this capability. However, their power to change the enactment of family violence was minimal; no child's skills (coping), capabilities (resilience), or understanding, could in of itself safeguard them from a perpetrator's choice to find them and use violence against them or against their mothers.

Mums positively influenced kids' experiences of safety and were KNR kids' primary and most permanent sources of protection, care, support, and nurturance. Yet they as whānau faced a double-bind of vulnerability: while Mums' capacity was temporarily redirected to safety-seeking and coping, tamariki, too, acquired additional safety-related burdens. Yet despite the threat the violence posed to both kids' and Mums' capacity, tamariki perceived their relationships with Mums to be a fundamental facilitator of their past, present, and future safety.

Their perceptions of the overlap between their own and their Mums' journeys counters deeply embedded beliefs about the role of tamariki within whānau and the assignation of responsibility for care. Their experiences are arguably better conceptualised by Te Ao Māori principles; a mutually interdependent exchange and upholding of wairua, in which their very essence is linked by whānau ties and fosters a naturalised exchange of care. **This positive interdependence underlines one of the primary imperatives of effective advocacy for tamariki – supporting and unburdening Mums so they have as much capacity as possible to support their kids.**

However, even deploying all of their strengths and strategies, well-equipped and protective mothering cannot circumnavigate family violence risk in its entirety.

Perpetrators had the most control over risks to KNR tamariki. While children's Mums' decisions enabled the uplifting of their wairua, the decisions made by their perpetrators (usually Dads) did not.

Tamariki lives were curated by perpetrators' use of family violence tactics, and the innumerable direct and indirect risks of and from that violence. Many of these risks did not subside or lessen post-crisis. Many of them were subtle, insidious, and not immediately apparent to those who were not trained to look for them. Many of them persisted even when perpetrators were no longer proximal to the tamariki or their Mums. Many of them were ultimately manifest in the toll on the capacity and resources Mums could parent with. Many of them may never have been known or addressed without KNR. Finally, when taken collectively, many of them lay the foundations for sustained social precarity and eventual adverse outcomes for tamariki.

Finally, children's safety (and risk) was also heavily oriented by the responsiveness of organisations, institutions, and systems. The stories of tamariki laid out in this report attest to the ways they and their Mums experience systems of power and decision-making that do not always best serve their interests - or their safety. The legislative setting of children's safety, and the artificial distinction it imposes on the risks to mothers and the risks to children is consequently as pivotal to their experiences of safety (and imagined futures) as their home setting is.

There was seldom evidence of institutional accountability for fathers' violence in the lives of KNR tamariki, arguably reflecting broader systemic trends of wilful blindness to the harm men's violence causes to children. Both kids' and their Mums' frustration, disillusionment, and sense of futility from system interactions are perceptible throughout their recollections in the findings: perpetrators *could have* been held accountable for putting their kids at risk, but rarely were.

Relatedly, KT reflected on the advances in their own practice relating to explicitly identifying the parenting decisions made by both perpetrators and (also victimised) protective Mums. They reflected that by identifying who was doing what to whom, and linking perpetrators' tactics of violence to the risks kids and their Mums were facing, they could more easily attribute responsibility for harm (to perpetrators) and recognise protective parenting (by Mums). Documenting the links between abuse tactics and risk and harm to tamariki then became a powerful tool of advocacy with other organisations.

The efficacy of this approach to risk within KNR demonstrates the potential power of family violence-informed responses to safeguard tamariki if applied across the spectrum of services and systems tamariki are part of. At present, the association between family violence exposure and adverse outcomes in both childhood and adulthood is widely acknowledged; opportunities to change the course of these outcomes are not. Most family violence initiatives aimed at children function as immediate risk interventions with whānau and/or skills-based interventions with tamariki. Few consider and aim to forestall adverse outcomes by working with tamariki (and by extension their whānau) to create structural, sustained safety from the family violence itself.

In contrast, Kōkihi ngā Rito's approach to safety encompasses safety from both the risks of family violence and the risks from family violence in children's lives. It therefore departs from the artificial distinction between *'imminent risk'* and *'risk of adverse outcomes'* by accounting for the multiplicity and temporality of risks to children. Kaiārahi Tamariki had to work at multiple levels to potentiate children's safety by:

1. ***Recognising*** **the scope, nature, and cause of family violence-related risk through purposeful, flexible, child-led, whole-of-whānau engagement;**
2. ***Reversing*** **the ripple of impacts across their lives by offering resources and support to them and their whānau;**
3. ***Restoring*** **children's and Mums' wairua, connectedness, and capacity; and**
4. ***Re-setting*** **their sustainable safety and security by bridging (and closing) the gap between perpetrators' use of family violence and the capacity and capability of organisations, institutions, and systems to disrupt it.**

The safety outcomes captured through KNR illustrate how safety can be formed and fortified through advocacy that responds to the evolving and enduring risks (and impacts) of family violence. **Approaching 'risk' as beyond the 'here and now' and instead anticipating how risk can be disrupted and reversed, may therefore represent untapped potential to forestall the mechanisms through which family violence victimisation in childhood leads to adverse outcomes later in children's lives.**

The consideration of risk within KNR, however, was invariably dependent on KT earning the trust of tamariki and being attuned to what they wanted and needed. Tamariki led the design of their own support, and their KT followed; the benefits of which were threefold. First, the child-led approach combated the powerlessness and helplessness tamariki experienced from family violence. Second, as found in other studies, emotional safety was not self-restoring the moment children were physically protected from harm: both anticipated and remembered risk were experienced in their emotional present. Tamariki therefore derived immense benefit from the emotional safety engendered by KT who were attuned to how and when they felt comfortable to explore their experiences of violence. Third, it shaped the efficacy of support children experienced by ensuring it was responsive to how they, as the rito at the centre both of their whānau and of the service, expressed what was important to them.

While KNR involved and partnered with whānau, the focal point of the service was the child, the smallest component of the whānau and the one commanding the least epistemic power. For tamariki (particularly tamariki Māori) time-bound and pathologising approaches may be more harmful than helpful. Whānau may disproportionately bear the burden of inadequate or fractured services, reinforcing perceptions of helping systems as hostile and uncaring. In contrast, the child-led approach used in KNR offered a flexible and amendable design of time, place, and pace, including the 'wavering door' principle, guaranteeing support only ended when children felt their needs were met. **Accordingly, evidence of safety advocacy across KNR tamariki shows both universality and distinction. Their safety goals and the methods by which they were achieved are all about safety from family violence, but are distinctly informed by how each individual tamaiti experienced safety in their unique whānau and contextual setting.**

This evaluation, in conjunction with other recent research, underscores the critical imperative to update our language, framing, and service design as our understanding of family violence, tamariki, and safety evolves. For instance, the findings signal the need to reconceptualise 'outcomes' as necessarily about 'safety', to situate 'family violence-informed practice' alongside 'trauma-informed practice', to challenge individual constructions of 'risk' and 'resilience', and finally, to attribute the 'intergenerational' patterns of family violence to unresponsive systems rather than to whānau. The presumed cyclical nature of family violence invisibilises the social drivers of family violence and repositions responsibility onto whānau – and by default, onto victims. Addressing family violence will arguably only be achieved via changes to the very fabric of Aotearoa's embedded structural divisions of power, and relatedly, by reversing and restoring the harms of both gendered and colonial violence.

Evidence of safety advocacy across KNR tamariki shows both universality and distinction. Their safety goals and the methods by which they were achieved are all about safety from family violence, but are distinctly informed by how each individual tamaiti experienced safety in their unique whānau and contextual setting.

We conclude with a snapshot of the practice ethos for best serving the needs of tamariki impacted by family violence. It comprises 10 principles, derived from the contributions of tamariki, their Mums, and Refuges, and offers a foundation for an enhanced (and shared) framework of understanding about safe and effective family violence advocacy for children.

1. Tamariki are taonga and deserve purposeful, effective advocacy as clients in their own right.
2. Unequal and oppressive systems (especially colonisation, racism, and gender inequality) lay the foundations for family violence, but using violence is still a choice. Perpetrators make the choice to use the power they have over wāhine and tamariki to undermine their safety, autonomy, dignity, and resources.
3. The use of family violence tactics against or around children (or against their Mums or whānau) is a form of child abuse that may severely impact their current and future safety, wellbeing, and life prospects.
4. For every act of violence by a perpetrator, there is also an act of resistance by the safe parent. This may seem like complicity or aggression on the surface, but serves to set boundaries around, cope with, limit, or reduce the severity and impacts of abuse for victims and their children.
5. Mums do everything they are free and able to do to keep their tamariki safe and well, and do not have the power to make perpetrators stop using violence. Whānau are instrumental in helping victims to be safe and helping perpetrators to be accountable.
6. Family violence is often ongoing at the time that we are working with tamariki and their Mums, and our actions can either put them at greater risk or make them safer.
7. The extent to which tamariki are impacted by family violence depends in large part on how we learn about, listen to, and act on risks they and their Mums are facing to create safety from these.
8. Tamariki and wāhine victims are the experts in both their experiences of family violence and in coping with the impacts of family violence. They often know what they need to be able to cope, but do not have access to what they need.
9. Tamariki are safest when they, their Mums, and protective whānau are supported in culturally responsive ways, have their needs met, and know that helping systems will take responsibility for managing perpetrators' violent behaviour.
10. How attuned we are to tamariki and how well we match our advocacy to what is important to them influences how heavy their (and their Mums') mental burdens are and what opportunities they (and their Mums) have to restore their wairua, capacity, wellbeing and happiness.

Implications and recommendations

Services and practice

As demonstrated throughout the findings and discussion sections of this report, KNR is an intensive service that effectively improves children's safety both in the immediate and longer-term. It is a service that most child victims in Aotearoa are presently unable to access.

The outcome of 'being safer' is enabled because of the exclusive, extensive, and sustained focus on family violence and safety. This risk-responsive approach is continuous; it encompasses all of the ways perpetrators' past, present, and future tactics of violence put tamariki at risk. As the findings illustrate, the identification, recording, and conveying of these risks and where they come from is the bedrock of the safety advocacy that follows.

KNR is oriented by and responsive to the ever-changing, ever-present picture of family violence risk in the lives of its tamariki clients. Maintaining this risk focus was crucial given the systemic gaps in how other organisations and systems considered the family violence risks to children. KNR worked to partially address some of these gaps (e.g. by drawing on months of risk information captured in KNR children's own words and giving analyses of these to the courts) and to subsequently support tamariki when they faced risks perpetuated by those same systems.

This evaluation outlines many of the core components of a child-centred approach that enable children's full and beneficial engagement – and therefore their safety. At the same time, it highlights the organisational infrastructure needed to enable KT to fully advocate for children: Refuges (and their Managers) relied on the tools and resources collectively developed within the pilot to facilitate service design and delivery that best meets the needs of their tamariki clients.

Organisational service design largely determines how effectively services for children experiencing family violence can meet their needs. Long-term, relational, flexible, open-ended, and, most important, child-led advocacy is resource-intensive, but required to meaningfully meet the needs that bring tamariki to KNR in the first place.

It is imperative that this support be provided within a specialist family violence service context. Correspondingly, it is imperative that KT in particular have the advanced knowledge and expertise in family violence to draw from, and be equipped to partner with and advocate for Mums as part of their advocacy for kids. It was evident from both tamariki and their Mums that truncated, tokenistic, or standardised alternatives shortchange children, precluding longer-term gains to their safety.

The myriad gaps in what other forms of support are available to tamariki reflect long-standing myths about what children need or are able or equipped to take part in. Tamariki, like their Mums, are capable of engaging with specialist support – provided this support is oriented to how they experience them *as children* and what will help them *as children*.

That includes helping those who are most prominent, proximal, and permanent in providing safety and support to them: their Mums. The effectiveness of treating the wound that family violence causes to Mums' personal, practical, and parenting capacity by nurturing their wairua, offering relief and respite from obligation, and building them up as parents has implications for family violence services beyond direct child advocacy.

We argue that most Mums, whether their tamariki are engaging with Refuge as primary clients or not, may similarly experience family violence risks to their parenting roles, and may similarly benefit from safety work that restores their capacity – as would their children.

Policy

As signalled above, the designation of capacity and capability (including deploying the right people with the right skills and knowledge) is paramount in shaping what access tamariki have to family violence advocacy. Funding decisions and prioritisation of services for children must therefore be informed by the (otherwise unmet) needs of tamariki and by the prospective gains to safety that services like KNR can offer if made available to children at the right time.

In addition, the findings underscore the ways tamariki are presently let down by the helping and justice systems they become involved in as a result of perpetrators' violence. Police, the child protection system, lawyers for children, the courts, and Judges often do not respond to children in ways that recognise family violence risk, give weight to children's needs and experiences, or make children safer. Yet these actors and organisations have immense power to shape whether children are condemned to living with family violence risk and its consequences, or whether safety and stability can be restored in their lives – as well as shaping whether tamariki learn that adults and systems can and will protect them, or not.

KNR is limited in its potential to change the endings of children's stories of violence when the scripting of these is imposed largely by systems that do not hold Dads accountable for their use of family violence and its impacts on their children. **Vulnerability to violence is always imposed – it is never inherent to children. Perpetrators of family violence make tamariki vulnerable. Their vulnerability is often then reinforced and extended by decision-makers who do not see and comprehend the family violence, potential risk, and what is required for children (and, importantly, their Mums) to truly be and feel safer.**

Substantive change to patterns of family violence in the lives of tamariki in Aotearoa is unlikely to change until the specialism of family violence is introduced into family and criminal court decision-making. Alternatively (or in the meantime), establishing a mechanism through which the input of professionals best positioned to hear and understand children's experiences and perspectives on both family violence risk and safety is sought and utilised within systems that decide their futures is a vital first step to making children safer.

Research

As implied by the title of this report, our evaluation contributes to the body of knowledge on what builds children's safety from family violence in an Aotearoa context. Research into what tamariki need from support services to both address family violence risk and facilitate recovery is very much still in its infancy; there is minimal evidence to drive the development of sector practices to genuinely meet children's needs.

The nature, role, and efficacy of 'child advocacy' within a family violence service context is often assumed, rather than known. This evaluation therefore provides a starting point for advancing practices for tamariki that are child-centred, family violence-informed, and incorporate a whole-of-whānau approach.

Although showcasing what can be concluded from the data collected from and about tamariki who participated in KNR, our evaluation also highlights significant gaps in research, knowledge, and practice about what tamariki (especially tamariki Māori) and their Mums impacted by violence need, how they are put at risk, what facilitates their safety, and what specific interventions or practices mean for them long-term.

The exploration of how and why family violence risk (and unmet need) lead to later adverse outcomes and identifying potential means of disrupting these associations is one outstanding gap. Quantifying service capacity for tamariki who have experienced family violence and the implications for their short, medium, and long-term safety would assist the sector and its structures of funding to better target support to where it is most needed – and to those left at greatest risk without it.

The evaluation highlights what can be learned about family violence risk and safety for tamariki through research conducted within the specialism of family violence and advocacy. Without that specialism, insight into what effectively addresses the adversity that is often unseen but insidiously interwoven throughout the fabric of kids' and their Mums' lives would not have been possible. In its place would likely be research reflecting the same harmful assumptions that pervade most researchers' and services' default positioning of children and family violence.

Similarly, children's experiences of participation have dual implications: first, that participating in research can be safe, positive, and beneficial for children when there are adequate safeguards and they are centred within the research design, and second, that interviewers' capacity to engage with them *as children* and *alongside whānau* about *family violence* was pivotal to how they experienced participation.

Our concluding research recommendation is therefore for the evaluation of family violence initiatives to be carried out only by research bodies whose knowledge of and mindset about tamariki, their whānau, and family violence reflect those of the services that are leading advancement of practice for them.

The nature, role, and efficacy of 'child advocacy' within a family violence service context is often assumed, rather than known. This evaluation therefore provides a starting point for advancing practices for tamariki that are child-centred, family violence-informed, and incorporate a whole-of-whānau approach.

Hunter's story

To explain the development and facilitation of Kōkihi ngā Rito (KNR), we draw on the special case of 12-year-old Hunter and his 'full-circle' journey with Refuge. Hunter's story provides a snapshot of the continuity of Women's Refuge's child-centred mindset, and child-led practice. Hunter is hilarious, intelligent, and creative. Hunter is a seriously dedicated older brother. Hunter loves school, computers, his cat, and his Mum. Hunter is sensitive, kind, thoughtful, and eloquent. Hunter has known Refuge for almost half of his life having stayed at Refuge when he was seven. He is a self-declared expert on Refuge and how Refuge should be for kids.

Hunter features in this evaluation as a client of Kōkihi ngā Rito, however, we first met him and his whānau we when he participated in NCIWR's *Kids in the Middle*[4] research at 9-years-old. In *Kids in the Middle* Hunter described his first time staying at a Refuge safehouse. His voice helped us to understand his experiences of help seeking after violence, and directly contributed to the development of Kōkihi ngā Rito to address the suffering of tamariki and to support their healing and recovery.

During the evaluation, we sat with Hunter and his whānau on his lounge room floor which was dotted with his precious things; his toys, his artwork, and models of characters he had dreamt up and bought to life. He told jokes about headless chickens and quipped about fast food restaurant slogans. When we met with Hunter he was in a good mood, declaring he felt *"wonderful"*, but Hunter's life leading to Kōkihi ngā Rito had not always felt wonderful and safe.

As is often the case for children who are victims of family violence, Hunter's safety was repeatedly compromised by his father. Despite the numerous protective mechanisms established by the family court, his Mum, and his safe people, Hunter's father chose to use violence against him. While Hunter was in the care of his father, his father physically assaulted him. This overt physical abuse was overlaid with his father's refusal to provide basic care for Hunter, including the provision of food for school, or medical treatment for Hunter's multiple and ongoing serious infections. Hunter also faced constant put downs, belittlement, threats, gaslighting about his relationship with his protective mother, isolation from his safe people, and continuous accusations of 'bad behaviour'.

Hunter's Mum expressed her frustration at their situation, *"I feel like we have done everything right and I'm just so gutted for Hunter"*. Hunter's Mum once again sought support from Women's Refuge for Hunter and herself, she explains, *"we are still doing this for Hunter to be okay and safe"*. When Hunter found himself at Refuge most recently, things were a bit different, he had a child advocate (Kaiārahi Tamariki) who worked just for him, and he had a whole programme available to support his needs and help him to feel safe.

Hunter contributed to the creation of a service that he then directly benefitted from. His unique situation showcases the value of seeking input from children into the development, delivery, and evaluation of services they interact with. It provides a prime example of how attaining specialist input from children as principal service users leads to safe and meaningful service responses. It reflects how essential it is to truly understand what matters to children, to hear from them about what they need, to listen to their advice about what will work best for them, and to give them autonomy over decisions and processes that directly relate to their safety.

4. NCIWR's 2021 research into what children aged 5-12 years old need in order to feel safe after family violence.

Hunter's story

When Hunter was 7 he stayed in a Refuge safehouse with his Mum and brother

Two years later Hunter (9) participated in the Kids in the Middle research, where he planned his 'dream Refuge' and said

"I would love this place because, well, I thought of it"

Hunter's ideas about his 'dream Refuge' and his feedback about how Refuge could better support kids fed into the practice approach of the Kōkihi ngā Rito pilot

Hunter's (11) circumstances changed, he came back to Refuge as a client of Kōkhi ngā Rito

"Before I met [my Kaiārahi Tamariki] I was traumatised because of what my dad did"

In 2023 Hunter (12) gave feedback about Kōkihi ngā Rito saying:

"My feedback already is just this is amazing already"

Hunter's casenote read:

"Hunter said he wishes that any kid that has been through violence with a parent could come to [KNR] because it has helped him 'feel happy and himself again'."

Hunter's final comment about what might improve KNR even further was:

"Me running the entire company, the corporate organisation."

Background

Explanation of terms

Family violence "covers a broad range of controlling behaviours, commonly of a physical, sexual, and/or psychological nature which typically involve fear, intimidation and emotional deprivation"[5] and is purposefully perpetrated by one person against another (or others). It represents a pervasive social disease, creating a ripple of impacts that spread across children's homes, whānau, childhoods, and imagined futures.

Family violence is known by many terms, such as 'intimate partner violence', 'domestic abuse', 'gendered violence', 'whānau violence' and 'violence within whānau'. We have maintained the use of 'family violence' as the preferred term throughout this report in order to:

- Avoid imputing violence perpetrated within or against whānau onto the inherently protective structure of whānau;
- Acknowledge that violence perpetrated by someone in a family relationship impacts the whole family – including tamariki; and
- Align with Aotearoa's legislative framework and the language used in pivotal family violence initiatives such as Te Aorerekura.[6]

This report uses the words tamaiti, tamariki, child, children, and kids interchangeably. We privileged the terms 'tamaiti' and 'tamariki' over any other kupu Māori (e.g. 'mokopuna') to describe the client group of KNR to retain the focus on children's present (rather than their role in association with others, past or future) and the corresponding focus on our own role researching tamariki in the 'here and now'.

The term 'advocacy' in the context of Women's Refuge encompasses all the work a Refuge advocate does with and for a client in the pursuit (and restoration) of their safety and wellbeing during and after family violence. The title Kaiārahi Tamariki (KT) is used when referring to the child advocates in the pilot. This term was chosen to reflect the guidance these KT offer tamariki and to situate their support as alongside and in the service of tamariki. It upholds tamariki authority over their paths toward safety and recognises their rangatiratanga.

We use the term 'family violence specialism' and related terms such as expertise, specialist, framework, approach, and lens in relation to a workforce whose core purpose and unique skill set is predicated on an advanced understanding of 'family violence'.

Relatedly, we use the term 'risk' to account for all of the ways family violence has caused harm, is causing harm, or may cause harm to children, as well as the ways that service interactions can increase or decrease risk. Conversely, our use of the term 'safety' encompasses both safety from further family violence and safety from the present and future ripple of harm that family violence causes in children's lives.

5. Te Rito: New Zealand Family Violence Prevention Strategy (Ministry of Social Development, 2002, p.8):

6. Te Aorerekura – the National Strategy for the elimination of family violence and sexual violence

We acknowledge that the use of terms 'victim' and 'perpetrator' are contested within family violence research and practice. However, we use these to distinguish who plays what role in the dynamics and harm of family violence: those perpetrating it, and those victimised by it. Accordingly, we refer to both tamariki and their Mums as victims of family violence.

We use the term 'whole-of-whānau' throughout this evaluation. Our conceptualisation of this term recognises that identity, safety, and wellbeing are experienced collectively, and that the principal and most permanent sources of identity, safety, and wellbeing for tamariki are their whānau.

Similarly, we use the term 'child-centred' (and variations such as 'child-led') to denote the ways in which children are positioned as the primary clients within Kōkihi ngā Rito, and to reflect KNR's focus on and attunement to children's specific needs as victims of family violence.

Te reo Māori glossary

Hapū – subtribe, kinship group

Hauora – holistic wellbeing

Iwi – tribe, extended kinship group

Kaiārahi Tamariki – child advocate in the Kōkihi ngā Rito pilot

Kaimahi – worker, Refuge staff

Kaupapa – topic, matter for discussion, subject

Kaupapa whānau – kinship group brought together by a common theme

Kiritau - self-esteem, self-worth, self-respect

Kōrero – to tell, say, speak, talk

Mahi – work, job, employment, practice

Māmā - Mum

Mana – strength, power

Nekeneke – to move

Ora - to be alive, well, safe, recovered, healthy, fit, healed

Rangatiratanga – chiefly autonomy, right to exercise authority

Tamaiti - child

Tamariki - children

Tamariki tāne - boys

Taonga – treasure

Tapu – sacred

Tikanga – correct procedure, custom

Tūpuna – ancestors, grandparents

Wāhine – woman/women

Wairua - spirit of a person

Whakapapa – lineage, descent

Whānau – family group

Whare tangata – house of humanity, procreator

Family violence

Women's Refuge has always welcomed tamariki. Children have been coming into Refuge services with their mothers since the day Women's Refuge first opened - 50 years ago. By now, it is well known that family violence harms women and children in Aotearoa; it is a violation of the tapu of wāhine as whare tangata, and the tapu of tamariki as taonga[1]. The youngest members of our society are impacted most, both as primary victims and as a consequence of living with family violence being perpetrated against their Mums and in their homes.[2] Until this is no longer the case, Women's Refuges will continue to welcome tamariki into their services.

Women and gender minorities are most commonly the victims of family violence and men are most often the perpetrators.[3] The aetiology of family violence is multifaceted and complex. Our family violence understanding is informed by feminist theories, including concepts such as coercive control[4] and social entrapment[5] to explain perpetrators' accrual and subsequent misuse of power over victims, and by our awareness of colonisation and gendered inequality as key drivers of its prevalence.

While family violence does "transcend all communities, ethnicities and social classes",[6] the harm it causes is unevenly distributed. The perpetration of family violence is a social and structural wound. It has the most devastating effects on those whose social and structural resilience is already undermined by oppression, exclusion, and systemic inequalities.[7] Widespread adherence to gendered roles and expectations reinforces the subjugation of women and the de-prioritisation of women's and children's safety, especially from men's violence.[8] Wāhine and tamariki Māori, in particular, suffer dual harm: family violence and ongoing state violence against their whānau, hapu, and iwi.[9] These harms interact with the gendered power and status divisions introduced by colonisation, demoting the status of women and undermining the protective connections to iwi and whenua.[10]

Family violence and tamariki

Every year in Aotearoa children are the victims of all forms of family violence – physical, emotional, cultural, social, and spiritual. They are also the victims of family violence homicide.[11] Children's voices are often missing in both prevalence data and the initiatives that this data informs.[12] As dependents, they rarely report family violence themselves, and rely on the protective capacity of adults beyond the primary victim to proactively report it. The data shows that:

- One child dies every five weeks as a result of violence in Aotearoa;[13]
- Children under the age of 18 make up 20 percent of all violent deaths in New Zealand;[14]
- The Family Violence Death Review Committee found that over 500 tamariki were impacted by the death of a parent from family violence homicide (of 187 adult deaths reviewed);[15]
- Children are present in half of all police call-outs for family violence;[16]
- Police found that children are primary victims in 70 percent of households where family violence is perpetrated;[17]
- Physical and sexual abuse against children is often perpetrated alongside abuse toward a child's parent;[18] and
- Of secondary school students, 16 percent report exposure to physical violence at home, and 12 percent report being physically harmed themselves at home.[19]

Exposing children to violence is recognised as a severe form of child abuse, irrespective of whether they are the primary or intended targets.[20] Tamariki are disadvantaged by perpetrators' decisions to use violence against them or against their protective parents and have little power over the way this violence shapes their immediate or future safety or their life prospects.[21] Tamariki arrive at Refuge because of the harm caused by perpetrators' abuse. The landscape of risk and harm that they face is oriented by perpetrators' past and future behaviours. Without adequate intervention, family violence

undermines children's physical, social, and emotional wellbeing, and in some cases, results in their death or the death of their protective parent.[2223] Family violence therefore represents a pervasive social disease afflicting tamariki in Aotearoa, which will continue unimpeded without the mobilisation of effective support and intervention.

We have chosen not to catalogue here the plethora of debilitating outcomes associated with tamariki who have experienced family violence; however, these are often categorised as poorer physical and mental health, and behavioural and social/relational issues.[24] Perpetrators' abuse tactics impact the protective social structures that whānau nurture children within. The destruction may only become apparent over time, through changes to wairua, mana, and ora, connections to whakapapa and whānau, relationships with safe adults and whenua, parental capacity and consistency, predictability of household resources and economic stability, and opportunities and prospects that collectively constitute children's safety and resilience.

These risks do not represent a predetermined pathway for children's futures, but rather can lead to potential harm – the extent of which is contingent on how systems respond to and take responsibility for children's safety.[25] It is well know that tamariki are among the most in need of protection from violence in Aotearoa. Less well known are the opportunities for meaningful intervention and the specific mechanisms through which their suffering and loss of life can be prevented, both at the time of their engagement in services and into the future.

The landscape of support for tamariki

There is a well-worn roadmap of family violence advocacy for women. However, the advancement of family violence advocacy services for children has not kept pace with that for women, for multiple reasons. First, although now benefiting from Government's recent investment approach to ending family violence, specialist family violence services were historically under-resourced. With high client demand and limited capacity or sense of fiscal permanence, specialist services rarely had the luxury of time and resources to reimagine services from the point of view of tamariki.[26]

Second, prevailing beliefs about how tamariki are impacted by family violence have oriented service provision. Aotearoa has yet to establish and apply a benchmark for best practice with tamariki impacted by family violence, and so the 'child protection' field of practice remains artificially separated from the 'family violence' field of practice.[27] Accordingly, the designation of safety-related decision-making for children solely to the court and the child protection system perpetuates widespread misperceptions about children's experiences of family violence, and their subsequent needs. Examples of these misperceptions include:

- Children's experiences of violence do not equate to those of adults;
- Children only experience violence as part of the household violence, not as individual victims with distinct impacts;
- Children are automatically safer when their parents are apart;
- Children are not harmed unless the violence is against them or in front of them; and
- The violence is between the parents, so the child is safe when seeing each parent separately.[28]

Such misperceptions render the outstanding risks of family violence in a child's life invisible and obscure the need for advocacy that is tailored and continuously risk-responsive.

Lastly, the inconsistent application of a family violence-informed understanding of children's needs across both the mainstream and specialist sectors precludes recognition of why children need *family violence advocacy* when there is family violence at home – not simply counselling or skills-based curricula. Tamariki harmed by violence in their home or against their parent want to know that they *are* safe, so that they can *feel* safe.[29] Yet unlike women, children do not typically have access to services that provide equivalently specialised family violence advocacy, either within Women's Refuge, or any other national organisation.[30] The potential to address the ripple effects of violence on children's lives consequently remains unrealised.

Inception of the pilot

In July of 2021 NCIWR launched Kōkihi ngā Rito (KNR), a pilot programme for tamariki aged 5-12 years old who access Women's Refuge in the aftermath of violence. The pilot's specialised family violence advocacy was developed in response to Women's Refuge's *Kids in the Middle* research,[31] which asked children directly about what a good family violence service would look like for them. It was among the first of its kind, both internationally and in Aotearoa, that listened as children voiced their experiences, wants, and needs.

When 9-year-old Charlotte she took part in the *Kids in the Middle* research she was asked how Women's Refuge could better support tamariki. She emphatically replied *"there are more kids who need help every day!"*. Charlotte would know; she is quite the expert, having lived and breathed a journey to safety and wellbeing in the aftermath of violence. Her sentiment was echoed by 9-year-old Ihaka, and his 8-year-old brother Kauri. They simply, and obviously, stated that greater support is needed "*so, more kids feel safer… instead of unsafe*". Ihaka and Kauri were full of wisdom having navigated their lives after violence, alongside their Māmā and supportive whānau. They, along with 16 incredible tamariki, shared colourful solutions and practical ideas that would help children to feel "*happy and cool*", and, of course, "*safe*" while they access Refuge services. These tamariki gifted Women's Refuge the building blocks of the Kōkihi ngā Rito pilot.

From the outset of the *Kids in the Middle* research, Women's Refuge was committed to honouring tamariki investment in the research. It was essential to transfer their participation into meaningful practice change and to respect their invaluable contributions by embedding their recommendations within our services. Women's Refuge then launched Kōkihi ngā Rito. The findings of *Kids in the Middle* provided the theoretical basis for the Kōkihi ngā Rito pilot and the specialist Kaiārahi Tamariki advocacy role:

1. Women's Refuge identified working with tamariki as an area of practice to be strengthened.
2. *Kids in the Middle* research asked tamariki what they want and need to feel safe after violence.
3. Research findings catalysed the development of a specific child advocacy service and role.
4. Kōkihi ngā Rito was launched – the pilot focused on family violence advocacy for tamariki.
5. Kōkihi ngā Rito is evaluated by tamariki, whānau and kaimahi.

The pilot is a novel approach to practice with tamariki. Its unique value stems from combining a proficient family violence analysis of child safety with the specialist tamariki-generated knowledge. Kōkihi ngā Rito is guided by five core tamariki specific Te Ao Māori values, and by the symbolism of the harakeke.

Whakapapa of the name Kōkihi ngā Rito

The tamariki in *Kids in the Middle* told us they did not feel heard by adults. They wanted a service that met them where they were at, not one that expected them to fit into a predetermined mould.

The name of the NCIWR pilot, Kōkihi ngā Rito, reflects the essence of the pilot's practice approach. The name Kōkihi ngā Rito was gifted by NCIWR's Te Roopū whakawhanake Māori. Kōkihi, meaning begin to grow or sprout, encompasses our desire for tamariki to grow and develop in ways they expressed are important to them. Growth is not linear, it is messy, and as such requires flexible, and layered support. At the heart of Kōkihi ngā Rito is a tamaiti, centred as taonga, and nurtured within the harakeke, symbolising safety and support. The whakapapa of 'Kōkihi ngā Rito' acknowledges that tamariki are of central importance, deserving of purposeful and thoughtful support.

Gendered violence is a legacy of colonisation, as are the experiences of land loss, displacement, intergenerational poverty, and forced removal of children from whānau.[32] The deleterious impacts of colonisation are acknowledged by Women's Refuge, especially the impacts on women, mothers, and children. The divine status of women and children was violently stripped from them, their roles within society were devalued, leading to gendered and age-based status differences and vulnerabilities that act as the preconditions for violence against women and children today.[33]

Whole-of-whānau and whānau-centred approaches have gained traction in the social sector in the past decade and have been found to better meet previously neglected cultural needs.[34] While government's endorsement of these approaches for family violence work is relatively recent, the essence, practices, and principles of such approaches are woven into the fabric of Te Ao Māori, and have been documented by Māori kaimahi and academics long before the rise of their popularity in mainstream services.

The word 'Kōkihi' felt right! When it comes to the impacts of family violence, we think about the development of our tamariki, especially tamariki Māori, but what does growth mean for them? Especially as today, Aotearoa is not set up to support them; it does not recognise them as taonga.

Pre-colonisation tamariki were equal, we Tangata Whenua knew they were precious, so they knew they were precious. Our tīpuna ensured their nurturing and safety as it was how they protected the lines of their whakapapa. The idea of growth for tamariki was never in question, they held their own elevated role in Te Ao Māori.

Just as the rito sprouts in the centre of the harakeke, our tamariki need to be placed back into the core of our thinking, so that we remember two things. Number one, that they are unique, and number two, that they hold the mana for the future of our whakapapa. Putting them in the centre again, back in the position they should be, means they can be nurtured, and also, they can stand tall and lead. If we are truly child-centred, we are child-led. It is then up to us to work with safe whānau, and safe communities, to wrap layers of support around them, to help in healing from the impacts of family violence.

– Te Roopū whakawhanake Māori

Kōkihi ngā Rito is a child-centred and whole-of-whānau approach. Tamariki, as the rito, are never separate from their whānau; their safety, wellbeing, stability, and connectedness cannot be achieved by themselves. Kōkihi ngā Rito recognises that the maintenance of whānau, hapu, iwi, and cultural identity and connection supports the nurturance and growth of tamariki. It understands that it takes safe, protective, and engaged support to enable and embed meaningful and ongoing safety.

Kōkihi ngā Rito aims to create a ripple effect. Just as te hau nekeneke rustles the harakeke, urging the whole plant to dance in unison, Kōkihi ngā Rito aims for synchronicity toward safety from family violence with and for tamariki, Māmā, whānau, and community.

The name 'Kōkihi ngā Rito' reflects the potential for tamariki advocacy to provide meaningful growth and real safety, especially in spaces that are not presently tailored to meet the needs of children made vulnerable by family violence perpetrators. In particular, it widens the scope to include unmet needs in the protective structures around tamariki – that of specialist family violence support.

As its name suggests, Kōkihi ngā Rito acts as a space in which children's needs *as children* who are impacted *by family violence* are always prioritised. The name Kōkihi ngā Rito reflects the unique approach that corresponds to children's unique needs. The whakapapa of the name 'Kōkihi ngā Rito' lays the foundation for the pilot to act as a mechanism for change in a society that is not yet set up for our tamariki.

Purpose of Kōkihi ngā Rito

The purpose of Kōkihi ngā Rito is to provide a family violence service for tamariki, aged 5 – 12 years old, that:

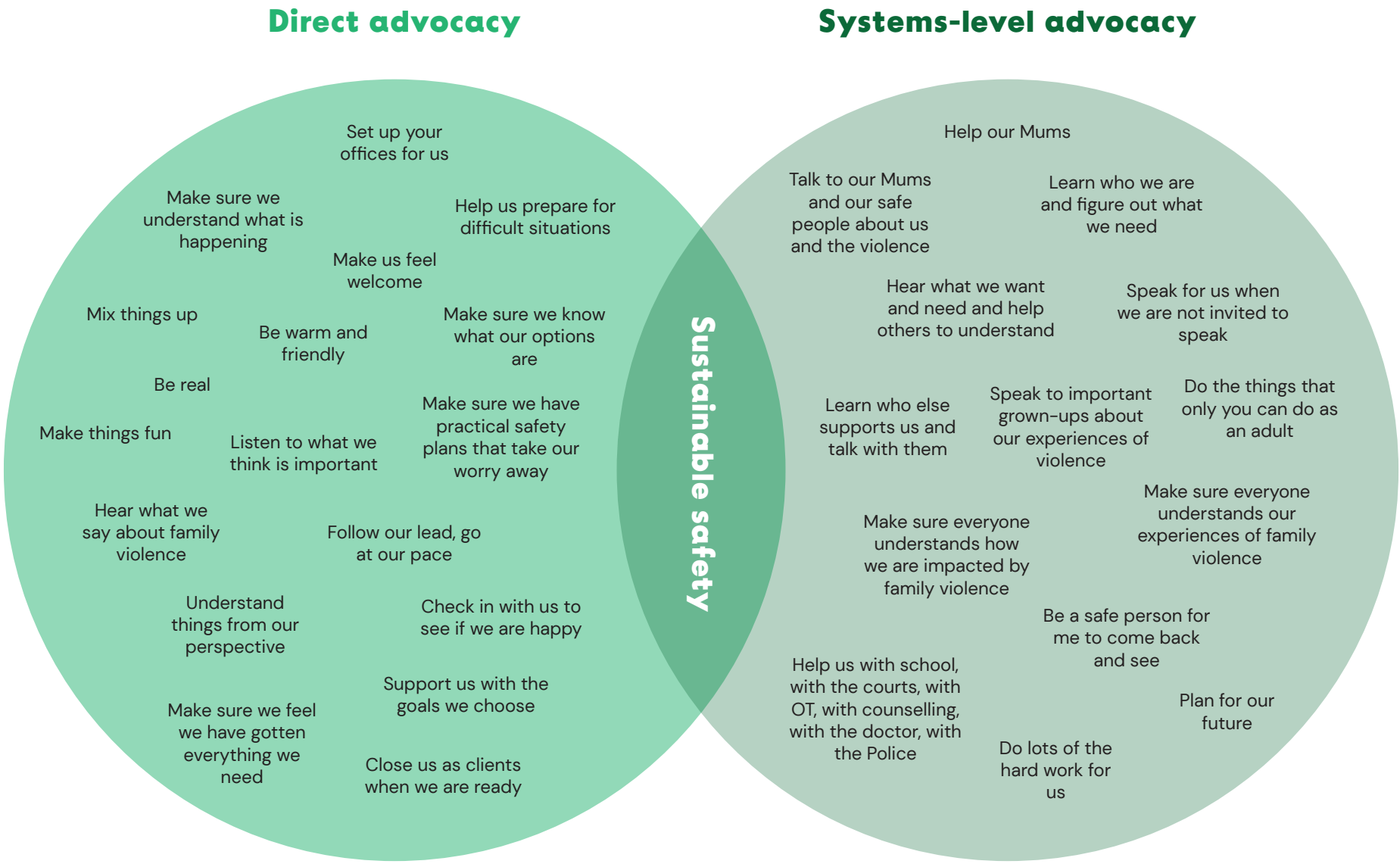
1. Does not take its eyes off safety.
2. Is led by what tamariki need.
3. Sees all the risks for tamariki that stem from perpetrators' use of family violence.
4. Continually responds with safety advocacy as risks continually evolve in children's lives.
5. Sees physical, emotional, social, and cultural benefits arise for tamariki when their safety is prioritised.
6. Supports tamariki to leave safer than when they arrived.

Kids in the Middle[7] found 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"*[35]. The tamariki who participated in *Kids in the Middle* told us that:

- Their experiences of violence and seeking support felt big; they felt overwhelmed, scared, and confused;
- They were preoccupied with worries about their Mums and wanted them to be supported;
- When talking to adults, or being in adult services, they did not always feel heard;
- Other services did not fully understand their family violence contexts;
- They often left services without having their questions answered; and
- They often left services without getting the outcomes that they desperately wanted.[36]

Tamariki also told us what worked well for them and what they needed to feel supported and safe. Their expert ideas and priorities created the foundation of Kōkihi ngā Rito child advocacy. The following figure (Page 34) of 'direct advocacy' and 'systems-level advocacy' was created from children's feedback about services for them.

7. NCIWR's 2021 research into what children aged 5-12 years old need in order to feel safe after family violence.



What children want and need from services in the aftermath of family violence.

Te Roopū whakawhanake Māori specifically developed advocacy explanations that correspond to the five core Te Ao Māori values which derived from the findings of *Kids in the Middle*. They serve to reinforce the child-centred, family violence-informed approach to advocacy.

There is synergy between the KNR values and the six pou MSD gifted to host Refuges – *'Mahi Tahi, Manaaki, Whakawhānaungatanga, Mana, and Tino Rangatiratanga'*. These support the framing of positive outcomes for tamariki wellbeing. This corresponding wellbeing focus complements the five values of Kōkihi ngā Rito and their priority of ensuring sustainable safety from family violence.

"I think it is really good to focus on the values that were created...the main one – Te Tapu o te Tamaiti – the mana of those children and te tapu being the sacredness of the children. Our values are there to acknowledge [tamariki] and to try and avoid them becoming damaged through family violence; it is intergenerational, but it can be stopped."
- Kaiārahi Tamariki Māori

Te Ao Māori values	Advocacy explanation
Te tapu o te tamaiti – Acknowledging and understanding the sacredness of a tamaiti and using this to ensure the safety of the tamaiti is paramount.	Tamariki are positioned as primary clients, deserving of advocacy that nurtures their wairua and mana. Every part of who they are is worthy of safety promoting advocacy that leads to real change.
Whanaungatanga – Relationships for tamariki are encouraged for growth and development.	Whanaungatanga lays the foundation for all possible future safety. Advocacy is genuine, meaningful, and strong. Nurturing relationships with tamariki informs the way you can grow and develop safety together.
Whakapapa – Tamariki are encouraged to explore all aspects of who they are, growing their sense of identity and belonging.	Know your tamariki clients; know who they are and who they want to be, so that advocacy can accurately reflect and represent their needs. Explore their curiosity about themselves and their world; support them to connect with all the parts that make them whole. Understand what safety looks like to them.
Koha mai, koha atu – Allowing for the tamaiti to share and receive in a way that is best for them.	Every tamaiti is full of knowledge, ability, and hope. Safety is determined by what and how they share - their opinions, wishes, and experiences. Support tamariki to pick their own paths, to explore and own their rangatiratanga. Be flexible and understanding of their evolving experiences of violence and safety.
Te mana o te tamaiti – Acknowledging that each tamaiti possesses strengths in their own ways.	Partner with tamariki and work hard for them. Every advocacy action is for their safety. Harness their strength to help them understand their journeys through family violence so they can feel confident about having safety in their futures.

Kōkihi ngā Rito values and their coresponding advocacy actions.

Purpose of the evaluation

This evaluation sought to answer the question: how does Kōkihi ngā Rito provide safety for tamariki who have experienced family violence?

The evaluation aimed to:

1. **Centre the voices of tamariki and their Mums by exploring their experiences of Kōkihi ngā Rito;**
2. **Understand what facilitates or disables safety for tamariki and their whānau; and**
3. **Explore the strengths and challenges of implementation from the experiences of Kaiārahi Tamariki, Refuge Managers, and other Refuge kaimahi.**

We chose not to predetermine 'outcomes'; but rather be led by what safety means to tamariki and their Mums, and the role of Kōkihi ngā Rito in enabling that safety.

The desired outcomes of pilot programmes are almost universally determined by adults, rather than tamariki themselves. However, these six Refuges rolled out their versions of KNR based on what kids said was important to their safety, what kids' safe whānau said they needed, and their own understanding of what their specific communities needed. Accordingly, the 'outcomes' that we focused on in this evaluation are those that tamariki and their Mums felt reduced family violence-related risk, enhanced their safety from family violence, and restored their wellbeing after family violence.

Method

Overview

The previous section of this report touched upon the disjointed provision of services to tamariki impacted by violence: 'services for children' and 'services for family violence' tend to be divorced from one another. Children are undermined by similar gaps in research, knowledge, and theory, and are typically given neither voice nor visibility within family violence literature. Feminist and anti-oppressive imperatives to consider violence, power, and untold stories therefore apply just as much to research with and for children as they do to research with and for women.

Children's experiences of violence, power(lessness), and epistemic status are both specific to them as children and simultaneously interdependent with those of their Mums. Our feminist and justice ethic of research is therefore predicated on this duality. Tamariki and their Mums are harmed and threatened by family violence; tamariki and their Mums are often less heard, under-served, and overlooked; and tamariki and their Mums offer unparalleled insight into what makes them safer or puts them more at risk.

Both these distinctions and overlaps in experiences are especially pivotal for tamariki and wāhine Māori in services. The recognition and valuing of sacred knowledge held by wāhine Māori, for example, was (and arguably is) brutally wounded by the violence of colonisation. Our research design therefore begins from the premise that tamariki and their Mums are the principal holders of knowledge about how they experience family violence, structural and systemic power, safety, risk, and effective support – and that the methodological design of research that invites their knowledge must counter rather than capitalise on the lingering harms of either colonial or family violence.

We therefore used a qualitative-dominant, mixed-method research approach, informed by feminist and anti-oppressive perspectives that account for the subjective, relational, and structurally-situated ways tamariki experience family violence, safety, and support. To uphold the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, we utilised a co-design process from the inception of the evaluation design through to the point of publication to welcome, kōrero with, listen to, consider, learn from, contextualise, and meaningfully present the stories of tamariki and wāhine Māori in ways that reflect the mana of their contributions.

Centring tamariki as the rito

Many evaluations of services for children exclude the perspectives and input of children themselves. Children have rarely (and only recently) featured as participants in research on family violence,[37] in part due to the contention and controversy about the inclusion of children in 'sensitive' research.[38] The consequent lack of literature on children's experiences of family violence and support seeking removes the voices of children from the design of interventions about them. Without their voices (as principal service users), the machinery of knowledge, research, and practice proceeds without their input, invariably then limiting:

- The extent to which the services designed for children are targeting the risks, needs, priorities, and values that are most important to children;
- The extent to which practice with and for children can be informed by the knowledge children have of *how* it would best work for them;
- The extent to which new practice approaches *can* meet the needs of children; and
- The extent to which evaluations of children's services can evaluate 'what works' for children, rather than 'what adults believe works for children'.[39]

Our evaluation seeks to answer the question:

'How does Kōkihi ngā Rito provide safety for tamariki who have experienced family violence?'.

This framing effectively flips the dominant (and prevailing) paradigm of successful service provision for children from one that focuses on 'improving children's behaviour and feelings', to one of 'ensuring tamariki have what they need to be safe'. This evaluation therefore privileged the perspectives and expertise of KNR tamariki clients, as they were best positioned to give insight into their experiences as service users.

Researching with tamariki (even in conjunction with their protective Mums) invariably involves the management of numerous risks: tamariki have less social and epistemic power, they and their Mums are often still at risk from perpetrators of family violence at the time of interviewing, and they and their Mums can potentially be harmed through insensitive, culturally unsafe, or ill-attuned research design.

Our risk mitigation was based on the following. First, we followed a comprehensive methodological process that was co-designed and overseen by Te Roopū whakawhanake Māori. Second, in accordance with NCIWR's procedures for research with children,[40] we followed a 14-step ethical process of engagement that involved the use of gatekeepers (children's Mums, other safe whānau and trusted adults, cultural advocates, and family violence advocates) to champion the safety and rights of tamariki and to ensure participation was on their terms. While consent is usually replaced by 'assent' in research involving children under 12, NCIWR researchers predicate children's participation on their informed, active, and continuous consent. Third, we positioned tamariki and their Mums as co-researchers, in charge of pace, content, engagement, and use of data. In service of this imperative, we used creative methods that were child-friendly, culturally responsive, fun, and always optional.

Data collection

The evaluation utilised qualitative methods, supported by descriptive statistics. Data were collected to understand:

- The experiences of tamariki and their Māmā;
- Kaiārahi Tamariki (KT) learning, perceptions, challenges, and reflections; and
- Pilot Managers' and other Refuge kaimahi perspectives, expectations, and impressions of the pilot's implementation.

Data were collected from the following sources.

1. Qualitative interviews with:
    - 10 tamariki (four Māori, four Pākehā, and two Pasifika) aged 5-14 years of age who had participated in Kōkihi ngā Rito at one of three pilot Refuges - one Tangata Whenua Refuge, one Pasifika Refuge, and one general Refuge
    - Five Mums of the 10 tamariki
    - Two Kaiārahi Tamariki – one tangata whenua and one tauiwi
2. Focus groups with:
    - Six Kaiārahi Tamariki – one from every pilot Refuge
    - Six Managers – one from every pilot Refuge
    - Three Refuge kaimahi (not directly involved with KNR) from one pilot Refuge
3. Recordbase - Women's Refuge client management system:
    - An in-depth analysis of information held on 18 tamariki files, three per pilot Refuge, including casenotes and completed case documentation such as risk and needs assessments, referrals, children's feedback, parents' feedback, and safety outcomes for children. These quotes are attributed to either Boy (age), or Girl (age)
    - Aggregated descriptive statistics from the files of all 126 clients that engaged with Kōkihi ngā Rito from 1 August 2021 to 1 April 2023
    - My Star™ outcomes

Meet the tamariki

Interviews

Tamariki and their Mums were interviewed by two social workers/researchers (one tangata whenua, the other tauiwi) at the time and place of their choosing. For most, the interviews took place at their homes or in Refuge offices and safe houses. Interviews were preceded by phone calls and face-to-face whanaungatanga. They were one to two hours in length and were led by children in both pace and content.

Tamariki decided whether they wanted their Mums and/or siblings present for all, some, or none of their interviews. All were comfortable with their Mums leaving the room as the interviews got underway. Each whānau was given a $200 voucher as koha for their participation and each participating child was given an individualised present (as were their non-participating siblings).

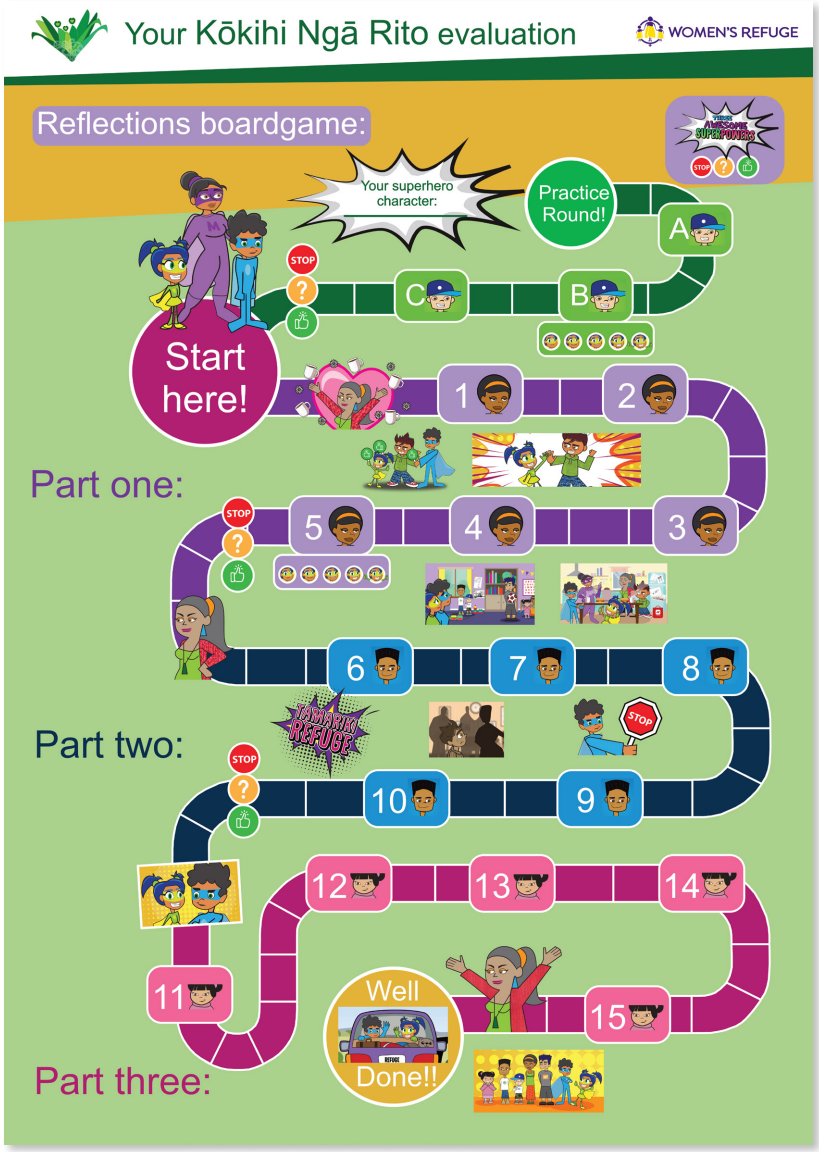
Each interview was guided by the use of a boardgame (Page 42) that was specifically designed for the evaluation. The boardgame had 15 question cards that asked about their experiences of KNR (with a visual character representing all KT) and included a practice round. The tone of the interviews was kept light and comfort-focused; in the practice round of the boardgame, tamariki landed on cards that enabled them to ask the interviewers to tell a joke or that asked them to choose a snack from the kai provided.

If tamariki were not interested in answering particular questions they could use their 'powers' (miniature stop signs, thumbs up signs, and question marks signs) to skip or query questions, or pause or stop the interview process. We did not begin asking questions until we, and their Mums, were satisfied that they were comfortable with us and confident in declining to answer questions. We encouraged, practised, and affirmed their calls for a break and their ideas for changing the way the game was played.

Example questions:

What did you need the most when you came to Refuge?	*What did you talk about with ?*	*What is the best thing did for the you and mum?*
What sorts of things did you do with ? *Whose idea was it to do those things?*	*If you had one big wish for your family/whānau what would it be?*	*How do you know when it is time to say goodbye to ? How will you feel?*

Tamariki 'powers':


Your Kōkihi Ngā Rito evaluation
WOMEN'S REFUGE
Reflections boardgame:
Your superhero character:
Practice Round!
Start here!
Part one:
Part two:
Part three:
Well Done!!


Your Kōkihi Ngā Rito evaluation
Start here!
Part one:
Part two:
Part three:
Well Done!!

Feedback from tamariki indicated their comfort with and enjoyment of the child-specific methods of interviewing. As we completed the interviews, tamariki asked to do it again, saying *"can you visit us again?"*, *"will you come back tomorrow? How about the tomorrow after that?"*, "*a double thumbs-up!"* and *"awww, but it was fun!"*

At the end of interviews, tamariki were invited to fill out the adapted five-point Likert scale (with emoji-based ratings) using their own personalised sticker sets.

We focused on fun and play as the precursors to tamariki comfort. Although the interviews were one to two hours long, we often stayed for hours longer with tamariki and their whānau. We brought kai (lunches, dinners, desserts, snacks, and treats), built lego with them, played with fidget spinners, had running races (and then applied Peppa Pig plasters!), told stories, talked about kids' schools and their friends, had slime-throwing contests, and learnt all about their pets.

In interviews and focus groups with Kaiārahi Tamariki, Managers, and other Refuge kaimahi, we followed the same 'boardgame' format but took a minimal role in questioning to enable kōrero to emerge within each group with little input from us. These took between one to four hours each.

All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed. Participants were given the opportunity to review their quotes and the way their narratives had been interpreted and recorded.

Data analysis

We used Atlas.ti software to analyse and code data from interviews and focus groups. The process of analysis and meaning-making from initial themes was collaborative and iterative, involving both tangata whenua and tauiwi. The analysis of qualitative data was supplemented by descriptive statistics derived from NCIWR's client management database.

Descriptive statistics include demographic data, aggregated risk assessment data, and metric based outcomes (such as MyStar outcomes and the number of risk assessments, safety plans, and reports of concern across all 126 tamariki Recordbase files). These are presented as figures and tables in the findings section.

Conclusion

Our methodological approach attempted to counter the systemic under-privileging of the stories and knowledge held by tamariki and their Mums. In sum, the research design aimed to meet children's needs and serve their interests both in the immediate setting (through their experience of participation in the research) and in the future implications of it (i.e. in the presentation of findings and consequent portrayal of service imperatives).

Findings

Introduction

The findings chapter is divided into seven sections. The first ("Who Kōkihi ngā Rito supported") provides a snapshot of the number of tamariki supported, their demographic breakdown, and their length of service.

The second ("Introducing outcomes for tamariki") explains how outcomes for tamariki were captured and what these include.

The third ("Setting the scene – the tamariki") introduces the reasons that children's Mums sought support for them through Women's Refuge in the first place; in short, the family violence, fear, upheaval, and crisis that led them to KNR.

The fourth ("Setting the scene – Kōkihi ngā Rito") sets out the findings relating to changes to practices and services, including how Refuges' practice evolved to better serve both current and future tamariki clients.

The fifth section ("Support that makes tamariki safer") is the largest and shows how every component of KNR functioned as a building block, that when layered together led to long-lasting, genuine, and durable safety from family violence.

The sixth ("What advocacy means for tamariki") then draws on individual case studies to show how KNR was applied and adapted to meet the needs of different tamariki and their whānau, and to show the life-course of advocacy for tamariki.

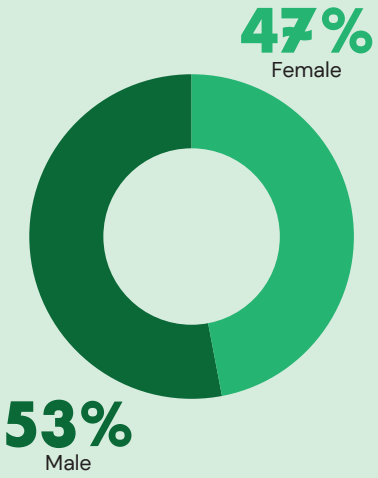
Finally, the seventh section ("Barriers to maximum safety for tamariki") sets out the systemic and structural disablers of safety for children, and how these impede the fulfilment of KNR and its potential to change children's stories of family violence risk and safety.

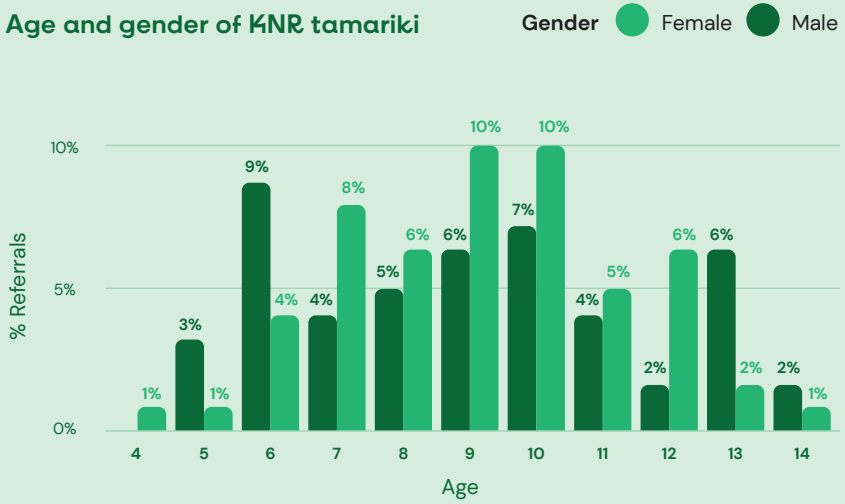
1. Who Kōkihi ngā Rito supported

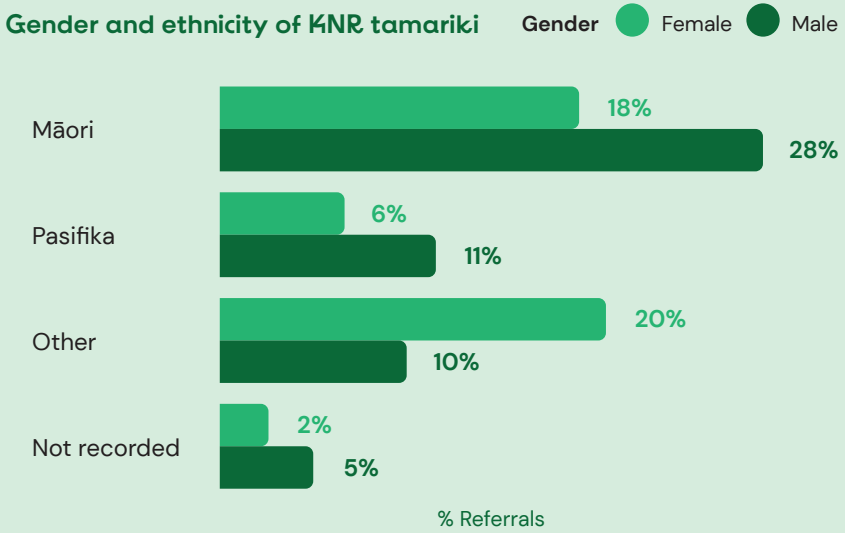
From 1 August 2021 to 1 April 2023, Kōkihi ngā Rito (KNR) was able to support a total of 126 tamariki aged four to 14.[8] As anticipated within the scope of the service aims – i.e. intensive and enduring support specific to the needs of each tamaiti – the average time-span of children's engagement was five months, with the longest-supported tamaiti in service for 580 days (and counting). The following figures set out the ages, ethnicities, iwi affiliations, and sex of KNR tamariki. These figures show how typically under-served cohorts of tamariki (for example, tamariki tāne) sustained their engagement with KNR, and how sustained engagement (i.e., over three months) with KNR traversed the full range of children's ages.

126

referals were supported





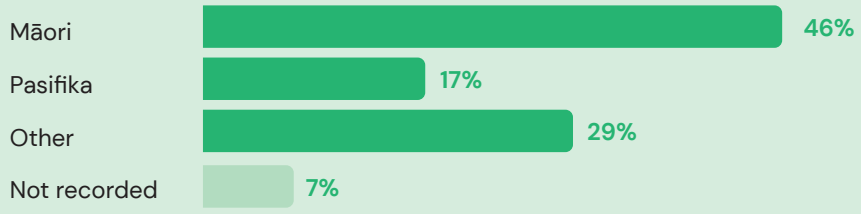


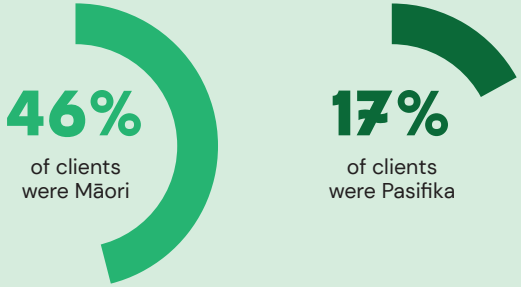
8. The KNR age bracket is 5 to 12 years old, however, data includes a 4-year-old (1%) who was engaged in KNR with an older sibling and was about to turn 5. 14-year-olds (2%) are represented as they started KNR at age 12 or under.

Ethnicity of KNR tamariki

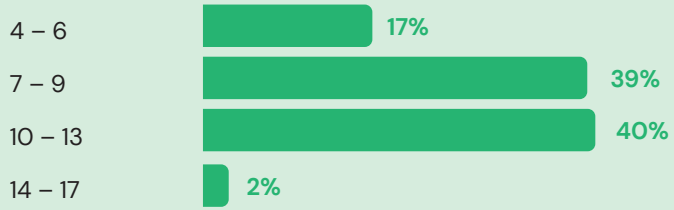
Complete ethnicity	Referrals
NZ European/ Pākehā	36
Māori, Ngati Porou	11
Māori, Ngati Tuwharetoa	9
Samoan	9
Māori, Ngapuhi	8
Tongan	8
Māori, Iwi not specified	6
Māori, Tuhoe	6
Māori, Ngati Raukawa (Horowhenua/Manawatū)	3
Māori, Ngati Tahu-Ngati Whaoa (Te Arawa)	3
Māori, Ngati Tahi/Kai Tahu	2
Māori, Ngati Kauwhata	2
Māori, Ngati Pikiao (Te Arawa)	2
Māori, Ngati Raukawa, region unspecified	2
Niuean	2
Pacific Peoples NFD	2
Asian NFD	1
Cook Island Māori	1
Māori, Ngati Haua (Waikato)	1
Māori, Ngati Kahungunu ki Te Wairoa	1
Māori, Rongomaiwhahine (Te Mahia)	1
Māori, Tainui	1
Not recorded	9
Total	**126**

Ethnicity of KNR tamariki



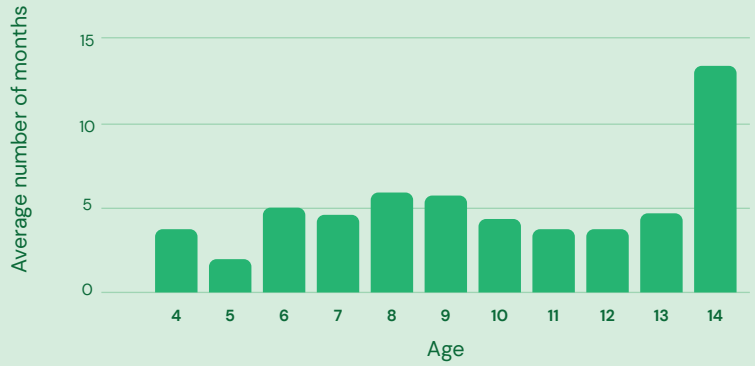


Age of KNR tamariki



Average number of months in KNR by ethnicity

Average number of months in KNR by age



The average length of engagement by age cohort demonstrates how support for younger children was as intensive and individualised as it was for their older counterparts. Equally, the highest average timespan of service was for 14-year-olds, all of whom were 12 or under at the time they entered KNR. The service periods they benefited from reflect the outstanding need for this age-group as they face immense transitory demands but are on the cusp of ineligibility and/or unsuitability of conventional services for children.

2. Introducing 'outcomes' for tamariki

The 10 tamariki participants spoke in depth about many topics during their interviews: ice cream, McDonalds, ways to stay cool in summer, different insects and where to find them, TikTok dances, nail polish, their favourite songs, Christmas presents, and watching Disney Plus. Tamariki also consistently identified 'outcomes' of their participation in Kōkihi ngā Rito (KNR) that collectively fostered greater safety from family violence (and its impacts on their individual and whānau wellbeing). The outcomes experienced by tamariki are evidenced by multiple sources of data, including:

- The ratings children assigned to My Star™[9] categories (a child-specific outcomes tool);
- Children's interview narratives;
- Tamariki feedback recorded within their casefiles; and
- Children's (emoji-adapted) Likert-scale responses during their evaluation interviews.

These are reinforced by themes within their Mums' interviews and interviews with their Kaiārahi Tamariki (KT), Refuge managers, and other kaimahi.

My Star™ is an outcomes tool that caters to children aged four – 18 years old. It explores eight outcome areas relevant to the life of a tamaiti, each of which can be rated from one (the worst possible) to five (the best possible). To measure change and reflect children's successes and growth, 98 initial My Stars™ were completed and 113 review My Stars™ were completed.

9. My Star: The outcomes star for children. My Star is suitable for children in families that are identified as vulnerable/troubled and receiving services. *Copyright: Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise Limited*

My Star™ outcomes

98

Initial My Stars completed

113

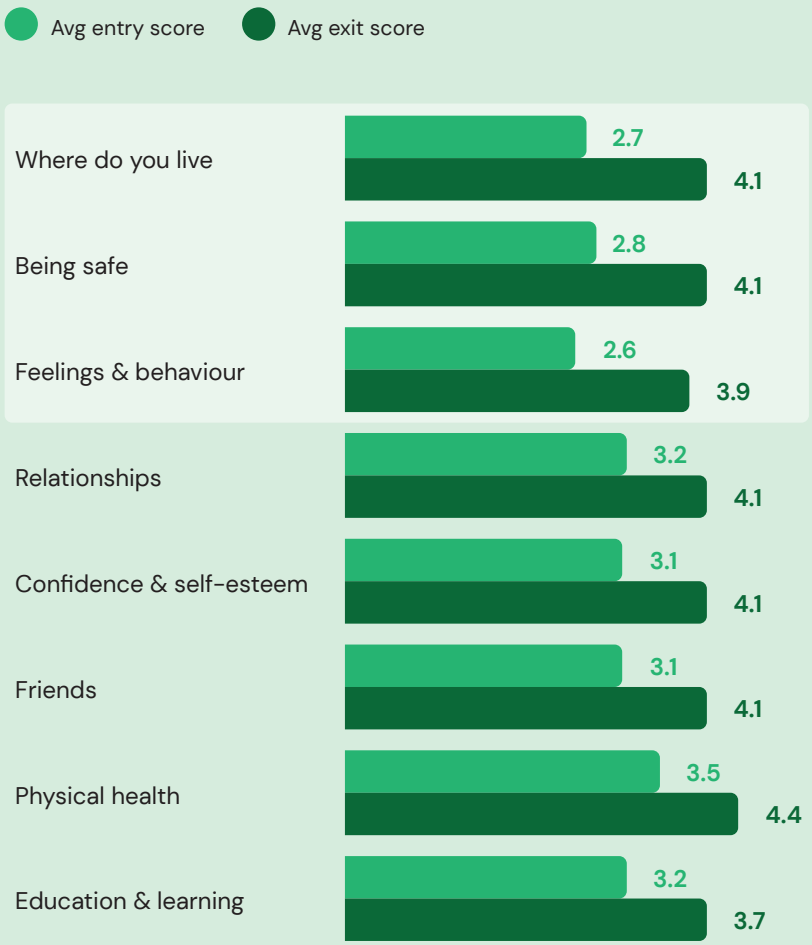
Review My Stars completed

KNR tamariki rated themselves on the following My Star™ areas:

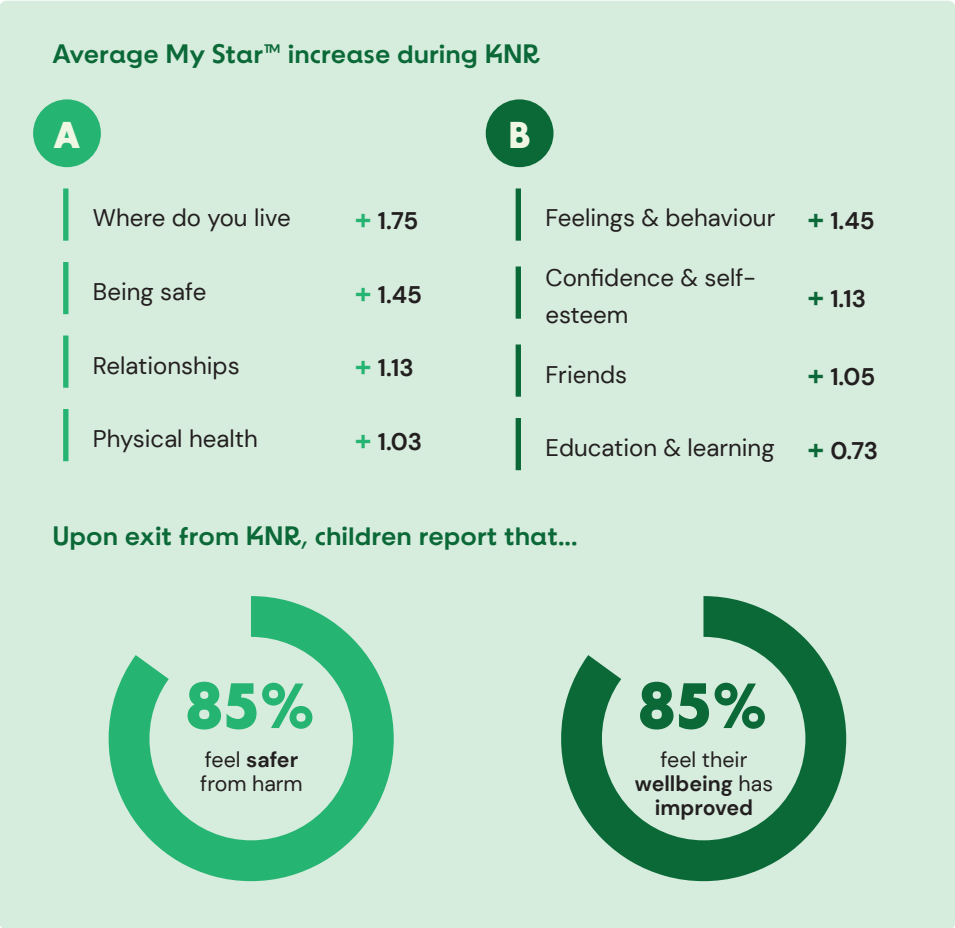
- Where you live
- Being safe
- Feelings & behaviour
- Relationships
- Confidence & self esteem
- Friends
- Physical health
- Education & learning

As demonstrated by their initial ratings, the areas of greatest concern for tamariki on arrival into KNR were 'where you live', 'being safe', and 'feelings and behaviour'. Tamariki with more than one completed My Star™ identified the greatest improvements in these three domains throughout the course of their engagement with KNR.

Average My Star™ score change during KNR



My Star™ groups the eight outcomes into two overarching domains. The first (a) reflects the safety and stability of their lives, while the second (b) reflects their perceptions of how they are coping. The below figure shows the average increase in how tamariki scored their outcomes in both (a) and (b). The aggregated increases in how children rated each domain showcase the overall improvements to their safety and wellbeing.



Tamariki (and their Mums) identified a range of outcomes that, taken alone, appear to be small positive gains, but which collectively formed part of (and were instrumental to) the overarching gains to their safety. While they also spoke about outcomes in terms of their (own or collective) wellbeing, these were communicated as a by-product of being and feeling safer. One Mum explained that:

> *For them it is pulled right back, it is like working with little goals [with my child] like 'how about we go out for a coffee or order a drink', 'yeah I could do that because I know I am safe'. – Mum*

Accordingly, outcomes related to improved wellbeing and individual skills-based gains (such as emotions and behaviour) are represented within and alongside their narratives of safety, in order to maintain the integrity of what participants regarded as most pivotal in the support they received through KNR. Some of the most common outcomes representing safety to tamariki are listed below.

Risk category	Examples of KNR-facilitated safety outcomes
Risks to children's wellbeing, connectedness, and use of voice	• Tamariki have safe and warm relationships with Kaiārahi Tamariki and have fun memories with them; • Tamariki feel safe enough to share their experiences and disclose further family violence risks over time; • Tamariki are supported in ways that are flexible, individualised to their needs and ages, and work for them when (and how) they need it; • Tamariki lead the type, pace, and breadth of safety work and are in control of how long they get support for; • Tamariki voices are represented in contexts where others have the power to make decisions that affect their lives; • Tamariki are proud of their own successes and progress and are confident to share their achievements with people closest to them; and • Tamariki demonstrate increased self-confidence.
Risks to their Mums' emotional, practical, material, and parenting capacity	• Mums are supported as the Mums of tamariki clients; • Tamariki have improved relationships and communication with their Mums and others in their whānau; • Mums have more parenting capacity and are unburdened by outstanding material needs, immediate shortfalls in household budgets, relentless caregiving responsibilities, and excessive safety and administrative workloads; • Mums feels validated, supported, and no longer isolated; • Tamariki spend time with safe adults to give Mum respite time; Mums' wairua is replenished and they are freer from the strain of parental coping and caregiving; • Mums have a clearer understanding of how perpetrators' use of violence impacted them and their tamariki, and do not blame themselves for the family violence; and • Mums are more confident in and proud of their protective parenting and overall parenting capabilities.
Risks to children's physical safety and exposure to more of the perpetrators' violence	• Tamariki have safety plans that they feel comfortable with and are confident enacting; • Tamariki feel safe enough to disclose things that make them feel unsafe, ashamed, or worried; • Tamariki have increased confidence in enacting safety strategies, and correspondingly, reduced mental workload and risk preoccupation; • The risks to tamariki are heard in criminal and family court; • Police and Refuge work together to safeguard whānau and hold perpetrators accountable; • Services and systems (including child protection) interacting with tamariki have the family violence information they need in a format that has the most potential to assist them in their decision-making about long-term safety; and • Safer decisions about tamariki lives are being made by other agencies and systems (enabled by specialist advocacy using comprehensive information about family violence and its impacts on the tamariki and their whānau and household functioning).

Risk category	Examples of KNR-facilitated safety outcomes
Risks to household stability, recovery, and healing for tamariki and their whānau	• Tamariki have secure medium-term housing; • Tamariki understand more about violence, victimisation, and perpetration, and know they are not responsible for the violence or its impacts on their whānau; • Tamariki have a safe space and safe people to help make sense of their thoughts and feelings about their Dads; • Children's experiences, preferences, and input are recorded safely, taken seriously, and used to make their lives easier and safer; • Tamariki have an improved understanding of and ways of coping with their mental health; • Tamariki have increased awareness of and ownership over personal and whānau strengths and skills; • Tamariki have increased capability for emotional regulation and communication of needs and boundaries; • Tamariki can anticipate what is happening next, when, and why; • Kids' whānau members are on the same page about what they need and how best to support them; • Tamariki have re-engaged in school, sports, and other interests, and the barriers to their participation in these have been removed.
Risks to children's trust and faith in services to help and support them	• Kids' worries about family violence risks are heard, listened to, and acted on by people who understand family violence; • Tamariki know and trust that they can come back anytime if they are struggling or need help in the future; • Mums are aware of and confident in what Kaiārahi Tamariki are doing with and for their tamariki; • The different parts of the helping systems Mums are involved in are working together more cohesively; • The different parts of the helping and justice systems tamariki are involved in communicate more with one another; • The negative expectations children, Mums, and whānau had previously formed about helping organisations has been countered; • Their experience of KNR promoted their hopefulness about safe futures; and • Tamariki (and their whānau) know where to get help if they need it and have positive expectations of the outcomes attainable through seeking help.

These outcomes consistently feature throughout the narratives of tamariki participants. In addition to these foundational components of safety, the data also show significant outcomes for individual KNR tamaiti. These include:

- A tamaiti returning to the care of her Mum, whom she regarded as her safe parent;
- A tamaiti returning to the care of both parents and experiencing the changed (safer) behaviour of his Dad;
- A tamaiti finally getting to spend time with her Nan and aunties as they understood more and more about the perpetrator's use of violence;
- A tamaiti getting her preferred outcome after having told her story in a supported way at a Family Group Conference;
- A tamaiti feeling confident and equipped to give evidence in criminal court and stand up to a defence lawyer using inappropriate questioning;
- A tamaiti feeling able to participate in a police process for a sexual assault investigation;
- A tamaiti believing he is safe, strong, and connected to his whakapapa without shame after exploring what the tie to his Dad's whānau means for him in his life;
- A tamaiti returning to school after a long period of disengagement;
- A Māmā who felt strong enough to cleanse her wairua and overcome the spiritual tie between herself and her perpetrator;
- A tamaiti feeling safe at home after months of fear, insomnia, and hypervigilance because his home was strengthened, alarmed, and prepared;
- A tamaiti who was able to strengthen his sense of identity and whakapapa in a way that felt safe for him;
- A tamaiti who could discuss the ways he would behave positively in future relationships;
- A tamaiti re-engaging with rugby and developing positive relationships with his coach and teammates;
- A tamaiti who formed his first trusting relationship with an adult outside of his whānau; and
- A Māmā who no longer believed she was responsible for the violence and no longer felt she should relinquish the care of her tamaiti, and who is now stable, thriving, and enjoying a loving relationship with her tamaiti.

Cataloguing every positive 'outcome' for every tamaiti who participated in evaluation would be unfeasible; instead, these are just a few select examples. They illustrate the breadth and depth of what 'risks and needs' entailed for different tamariki, and how widely divergent the nature and scope of the support they received was as a result.

3. Setting the scene – the tamariki

Tamariki do not simply manifest themselves in Refuge spaces. They are coming *from* something: violence, fear, uncertainty, distrust, and anticipation, and *from* somewhere: home, school, the police station, or Nan's place. They bring with them their distress, and the distress of their Mums and whānau. It is fitting then that the next sub-set of findings is about what (and who) tamariki arrived with. Their experiences are captured in their client files, and in particular within their tamariki-specific risk and needs assessments.

90%

have risk assessments created

99%

have new safety plans created

8

tamariki have ROC on file during service

All tamariki in Kōkihi ngā Rito (KNR) are victims of family violence. We found that 100 percent of them were made to feel scared of their perpetrator. The prevalence of specific family violence tactics used in relation to tamariki clients (as reported by their Mums) are listed in the below table. The tactics shaded in red represent those recognised as common precursors to family violence homicide, highlighting the severity (and associated risk) of family violence that perpetrators had already brought into children's lives.

Risk data captured for KNR tamariki at Refuge	% of KNR clients
The perpetrator physically harmed the child/ren	49.3%
The perpetrator harmed their Mum while pregnant	46.7%
The perpetrator's abuse started/got worse during Mum's pregnancy	37.6%
The perpetrator took the child/ren, or threatened to	88.3%
The perpetrator threatened to kill or hurt the child/ren?	68.8%
The perpetrator harmed Mum in front of the child/ren	79.2%
The perpetrator used the children to try see or contact their Mum	53.2%
The perpetrator verbally abused their Mum in front of them	100%
The perpetrator used the children to find out details about Mum	41.5%
The perpetrator made the children feel afraid	100%

Prevalence of tactics in children's experiences of violence.

We found that for some tamariki, the violence had been perpetrated throughout most of their lives; for others it had been brief but severe. As and when they felt sufficiently safe to, tamariki disclosed physical, sexual, and emotional abuse that violated and undermined their tapu, mana, wairua, kiritau, and hauora.

Tamariki were acutely aware of what brought them to KNR:

- *Before I met [KT] I was traumatised because of what my dad did. – Hunter 12*
- *I needed a little bit of help about the problem with my father. – Corey 9*
- *Just all the things with my dad. – Abbie 14*
- *He hit across my head and locked me outside. – Taika 7*

Tamariki readily named the issues precipitating their involvement with KNR as stemming from the violence used by their perpetrators (their fathers or Mums' partners).

Their Mums likewise articulated the specific needs they hoped would be met for their children through KNR, as per the examples below.

- *I believe, well [my son] very much needed to be understood. – Mum*
- *[My child needed] that safe person because otherwise I couldn't imagine it. I remember hugging my dad when I was young, I couldn't imagine not feeling safe. – Mum*
- *I think someone to listen to what happened to just [my daughter], like it happened to all of us as a family, and I think a lot of the time it gets put into that [whole family context]. – Mum*
- *[The children's] whole world has been turned upside down. – Mum*

Mums, as both the primary victims of their perpetrator's violence and the safe parents of KNR tamariki, were also impacted individually and were often still at critical risk of further violence. The following excerpts from their stories illustrate the severity of the risks they lived with.

- *He tried to kill me*
- *He locked me inside our house for a week*
- *He punched my face*
- *He raped me most weeks*
- *He broke my arms and ribs*
- *I was strangled and burnt*
- *He held a weapon to my throat*

In addition, we collated the risk and needs assessment data from children's files relating to the use and efficacy of court interventions. Information about breaches is shaded in red to reflect their significance as indicators of risk for family violence homicide.

Risk data captured for KNR tamariki at Refuge	% of KNR clients
The perpetrator breached the protection order in the four weeks preceding Mum's engagement with Refuge	57.1%
The perpetrator breached the protection order by making direct and unapproved contact with the child/ren	58.4%
There is a protection order naming the child/ren and their Mum as protected persons	68.8%
There is a parenting order that directs who cares for the child and under what conditions	66.2%

Prevalence of court interventions and breaches in children's experiences of violence.

The snapshot of risk and needs assessment data regarding the use of safety mechanisms in the lives of KNR clients also highlights how:

- **Mums pursued state mechanisms of safety to protect their tamariki;**
- **Perpetrators circumnavigated or disregarded these mechanisms of safety to continue their violence; and**
- **The efficacy of protective state mechanisms was contingent on state actors' capacity (or willingness) to uphold and enforce them.**

All of the children's Mums worked hard to maintain safety for their tamariki and to parent purposefully and thoughtfully at every stage. Equally, they acknowledged how their perpetrators' use of violence adversely impacted their capacity to parent as consistently and to the standard they ordinarily set for themselves. Some described how the violence rendered them physically unable to parent, diverted their emotional and mental resources to the immediate management of the impacts of violence, or detracted from the stability of the household setting they were raising their tamariki within.

The (in)efficacy of protection and parenting orders as safety interventions are testament to the enduring risks of perpetrators' abuse. These risks persist even when Mums were proactively instrumentalising all available avenues of safety. Perpetrators' use of violence also continued to undermine the safety of tamariki despite the best efforts of their Mums. For instance, one whānau talked about the apparent endlessness of the violence – even after Mum had taken steps to remove the children from the setting of risk, the court's decision about care of the tamariki precluded freedom from the perpetrator's violence.

> *He kept coming round and screaming at us. – Boy, 8*
>
> *We went from unsupervised [visits] to a transition stage to monitored when there was smacking, yelling and screaming and swearing... I could hear him screaming and then the kids come back and they are all messed up. – Mum*

One Mum talked about how supporting children with trauma from family violence required a different approach to supporting children with trauma generally.

> *Refuge has a lot of knowledge on trauma and obviously domestic violence abuse, whereas if you see a counsellor they might have trauma counselling, but trauma could be like being in a car crash or drowning. Domestic violence trauma is a whole different trauma, your parent [harming you], the most trusted people in your life, like it is different. So, I guess it is very hard to find someone that is very centred on* ***domestic violence trauma and understanding what that is actually like for children.***
> *– Mum*

Both tamariki and their Mums pinpointed the principal gap (prior to KNR) in the landscape of support available for and specific to tamariki: specialist support that was both *for tamariki* and *about family violence*.

4. Setting the scene – Kōkihi ngā Rito

Just as acknowledging the backgrounds and risk settings of tamariki is vital to understanding their experiences of Kōkihi ngā Rito (KNR), so too is acknowledging the intentions and practices of the Refuges. We found that in addition to the outcomes for tamariki, there were several outcomes specific to pilot Refuges that signalled greater preparedness to potentiate advocacy for tamariki clients. These included changes to their Refuge's approach to advocacy, the introduction of tamariki-responsive tools and resources, and strengthened infrastructure for inter-agency practice.

KNR pilot managers and Kaiārahi Tamariki (KT) reflected on the need for KNR, how they had imagined a service for children, and what it means to them, their Refuge, and their tamariki:

> ***We knew [child advocacy] was a missing link for years and we were trying to work out how to do that. So that was our missing link. So now our chain is complete. The biggest difference that I see from a year ago to now is the commitment and the drive. I know now that service is going to be delivered the way that we have all dreamed and envisioned, not having sleepless nights thinking 'what are those children actually going to learn?'. – Manager***

> *If we are not going to advocate for [tamariki] who will? Mum probably doesn't have the skills or the knowledge of the family violence field or any direction to go in. She is just trying to survive. – KT*

The kaimahi at a pilot Refuge discussed how providing consistent support to tamariki was vital to safe advocacy, in much the same way it is in advocacy for wāhine clients. Safety, to Refuge kaimahi, was about providing children with an equivalently dedicated service:

> *I think you just knew tamariki were going into a safe pair of hands with someone that was going to actually explore everything that was going on for that child because, as a woman's advocate that is what we do for the Mum. But there wasn't that for the children. – Refuge kaimahi*

> *I think the best thing about having Kaiārahi Tamariki in our Refuge is it is the missing link...so now we have got everything we need to be able to wrap around that whānau not just do bits here and bits there. – Manager*

> *Back then we couldn't really pay attention to the kids, most of the time it was the Mum. But now I am in the [KT] role and talking to my colleagues about [KNR, saying] 'the kids have the same right as the Mum and they are as important as the Mum'...it is good for us to both hear how the Mum and how the kids feel when it is time to make that decision for their wellbeing as well as a family as a whole. Not just the Mum but consider the kids as well. Especially as a Pacific Island Refuge yeah, we never paid as much attention to the kid's voice. – KT*

Managers and KT explained that as both family violence and systemic barriers to safety are sustained and reproduced over time, there is an ongoing need for specialist family violence services that prioritise tamariki and their voice.

> *[If there was no KNR] then tamariki would still be silent and it will mean that for the next generation, there will be no generational change because that cycle will keep going. – Manager*

I think for us, our kids will remain in silence still and they will never be heard, but KNR has provided them the opportunity to raise their voice and to be heard, especially for us Islanders and to change their mentality. – KT

The kids' voices would never be heard. – KT

The human rights of the child have to be heard and be validated and be seen. – Manager

I don't think the depth of their true experiences, or the true force of the child would have been able to be captured without this pilot. – Manager

Kaiārahi Tamariki also spoke about their favourite aspects of Kōkihi ngā Rito, many of which were echoed by tamariki as features that enabled their safety, comfort, and growth.

You don't have a set amount of time that you have to meet the objective in, because KNR is child-led. My favourite part is that you get to build that relationship at the start. Like with no time pressure and stuff, because I've always had that in other roles. – KT

I think Kōkihi wouldn't work as well if there was a time limit because the court doesn't work to a time limit, you know. – KT

[Tamariki] are getting the same quality service that our wāhine have been getting for years, like, you can do that crisis stuff, but you can now actually start working towards some of their goals and longer-term plans. – KT

When asked about the evolution of their practices within KNR, Kaiārahi Tamariki and other pilot Refuge kaimahi identified similarities that traversed every pilot Refuge; specifically, centering children, working with the whole whānau in culturally responsive ways, and never taking their eyes off the family violence.

I see so many benefits in the cultural way because in general: I think that what is good for Māori is mostly good for everyone. But we know that is not necessarily reversed, right!?...[I] probably look way deeper into the [family violence] risk, you think about what the tactics are, and everything like that, and then you establish like the whole whānau perspective. – KT

I'm like you have to think broader because you can't do the child in isolation because they don't live in isolation, they live with this whānau. So they are in that home, they are affected by what is affecting their caregiver. – KT

Participants from Tangata Whenua Refuges emphasised the importance of practicing from Te Ao Māori perspectives.

It's whanaungatanga, but always with the child, the tamaiti, right in the front of her mind. – Manager

I feel like I spend so much more time getting to know even just the Mum and that obviously contributes to the safety of the children because I need to know who they are. It is just so much less formal I feel, and I guess that is also cultural in a way. We like to spend time and get to know everyone before we can connect, before we ask like, 'have you experienced violence?'. I guess it is going to benefit the whole family unit and Māori kids who are used to the connection. – KT

The values we use in Kōkihi, like whakapapa, whakawhanaungatanga and all that, those [are] taonga they [tamariki] get when they are growing up. – KT

Similarly, Tangata Pasifika Kaiārahi Tamariki spoke about advocacy for children being reliant on practitioners understanding (and respecting) the intricacies of aiga (family).

> *For us it is collective, and it is not just the child because if you work with the child you are working with the Mum as well. It is just out of respect because respect and relationship, the vā within our culture as well. We have to be careful that we don't trample on any spaces [because] then we are not welcome [to advocate] there. So, it is really important for us to acknowledge the Mum and then the whānau as well with the journey of violence going through with the children. – KT*

> *It is a bit hard because as a PI it is different especially when I'm going there for the children and because growing up in Samoan or PI culture, PI children they grew up in silence. So, when an outsider comes into their home it is quite different especially when I deal with the kids. I just don't deal with just the kids it is the whole whānau. – KT*

KT described the particular challenges of establishing a shared family violence practice lens beyond their own practice. Several commented on the persistence required to effect change in how other professionals and other services within the helping system viewed, understood, and responded to children experiencing family violence. One KT described it as *"being a pest, introducing who I am, saying why I fill a specific place for this tamaiti."*

> *[With] the family safety team, I have had to push back a couple of times, especially with three of my kids at the moment, but the penny is dropping [around family violence] risk because they were kind of rolling their eyes a bit about this whānau because [Mum] has come up a lot. [I now] just share enough so that they understand the child's situation...so they know the fear that the kids have of a certain situation. – KT*

> *The police know I will go and do [a report of concern] when needed. I find that really beneficial because [now] I ring up and go can you go and do a welfare check for me and they will be there in a second. They are my lifeline with three of [my clients] at the moment, to get round there to see they are still there. – KT*

> *You have to be very persistent; I have found that [other services] have let me attend their sessions and [now] ask me for my family violence advice and my perspective before submitting reports and stuff which is really cool. Like they are definitely taking the engagement that I am having with tamariki into account now which is really good. – KT*

Mums, too, reflected on the effectiveness of the joined-up 'specialisms' of child-centred and family violence-informed within KNR practice. One noted the tensions she experienced between Te Ao Māori and Western systems and approaches, and how these were ameliorated by her KT's ability to walk in two cultural worlds simultaneously.

> ***I think the best thing about [KT] is she can walk the path with Te Ao Māori and Te Ao Pākehā and join it because in this world you have to have both. You can't make the changes you want to make if you don't hold that Pākehā with you...But with her she had both and that is what I respected about her she knew the whakaaro from the Pākehā world, you know, they use stuff like PTSD, trauma, you know, just all of that whakaaro. Yeah, I understand that in my brain, but my heart doesn't know what legislation is, my heart just knows I tried to love this man and he just tried to kill me and my kids, you know. – Mum***

Managers of pilot Refuges reflected on some of the 'points of difference' they had observed in the practice of their KT with tamariki when compared to standard practice. In particular, they noted how much more time and capacity was able to be utilised for proactively seeking out collaboration with other professionals and creating opportunities and resources for kids.

> *So already in this space she is engaging with the school social workers and getting that ball rolling because she wants to get into the schools. – Manager*

> *Like interjecting herself into spaces where normally they wouldn't have an outsider come into their spaces and she does it with grace and poise. – Manager*

> *Yeah, she will bring in a left field person to articulate what she wants but with a kids' focus, kids' language. – Manager*

> *Schooling in our area is quite a big thing and she like really buddies with the schools and the truancy officers and stuff like that. She has got those relationships. – Manager*

We found that in addition to articulating a change in practice approach, pilot Refuges implemented a suite of other changes to support the practices of their Kaiārahi Tamariki and meet the needs of tamariki. While some of these changes were specific to the Kaiārahi Tamariki roles, others showed wider organisational change in now Refuges prepared for and catered to tamariki. Examples included upgraded and tailored tamariki spaces, appropriate and inclusive child-specific information, age-appropriate consent activities, and upgraded welcome packs. One Mum reflected that:

> ***It is quite amazing, it is not so clinical here, like they could sit on bean bags and then they have fairy lights. So, kids come in and go 'it's like my bedroom Mum'. You don't get that kind of relaxed environment in actually any other place we've been through.*** *– Mum*

New resources and practice tools were used to support the new practice approach, the most discussed of which was a new tamariki risk and needs assessment. This enabled family violence information to be recorded in relation to children's safety specifically and to guide the safety-focused advocacy from the outset of kids' engagement.

The risk and needs assessment format captured family violence information including each child's (and their Mum's) sense of and worries about risk, the source of risk, the nature and extent of risk, what 'safety' meant to the tamaiti, and the roles that their whānau and others played (or could play). In short, it documented who was doing what to whom, put the child's voice at the centre, drew in their whānau, and explicitly linked risk and need to the family violence.

Explicit questions about family violence were asked within Mums' risk assessments and used to pre-fill children's, while children's input was sought through exploratory open questions. To safeguard the quality of family violence information and its utility within and beyond KNR (e.g. so it would showcase family violence when given to the court), each risk assessment began with an attribution of risk. This standard risk attribution is copied below.

> **[Child's name] safety and wellbeing has been threatened by the behaviour of [perpetrator's name]. The stability and functioning of the caregiving setting are constrained by [perpetrator's name] use of family violence, leading [Mum/safe caregiver's name] to seek support to strengthen [child's name] safety and wellbeing.**

The information provided by tamariki (and whoever they want present) captured their social, emotional, relational, and health information and, most importantly, showed how 'harm' was engendered specifically as a result of perpetrators' use of violence. The risk and needs assessment then informed the design of advocacy actions and KT decision-making regarding child safety.

Of the risk and needs assessments we looked at on tamariki Recordbase[10] files, we found that family violence gave rise to risks such as:

- Unstable or unsuitable housing situations, such as, from Mums and kids having to escape the family home, or from economic abuse leaving their Mums with debt, minimal income, or poor tenancy records;
- Exclusion from or poorer outcomes at school, such as from tamariki feeling unsettled, having to move schools, being unable to participate in the organisations in their area, having their things destroyed by perpetrators, inability to concentrate because of constant preoccupation with risk, or as a consequence of behaviours (e.g. refusal to speak or aggression) children developed to cope with family violence trauma;
- Self-harm, suicidal ideation, and disordered eating, following psychological abuse, exposure to family violence, and sexual abuse by the perpetrator;
- Feeling powerless, out of control, and distrusting of police and helping systems as a result of both perpetrators' narratives about police and courts and the inaction and continued risk that followed their disclosures of violence;
- Poorer health outcomes and delayed health treatment when they were forced to spend time with perpetrators who did not seek healthcare for them;
- Disrupted social relationships, as a consequence of shame and embarrassment about perpetrators' behaviour, having to keep secrets, and people viewing them differently because of the impacts of violence;
- Sleeplessness and anxiety, such as when they felt compelled to constantly check doors and windows, act out games of safety-seeking, or mentally run through their safety plans;
- Worry about their whānau, including their Mums and their siblings, because they were acutely aware that the perpetrators' violence may one day take the lives of their Mums or traumatise their siblings;
- Less predictable caregiving and the reduced parenting capacity of their Mums, because of the mental and physical impacts of violence against their Mums – such as when perpetrators had raped them, strangled them, told lies about them to damage their credibility, threatened their children, or imposed financial restrictions that meant they were at risk of losing their homes, ability to buy food, or the care of their children; and
- Recurrent demands on them to emotionally engage with the family violence, such as having to explain the perpetrators' actions and the impacts on themselves to multiple professionals, talking to police, dealing with the numerous and often contradictory ways they and their siblings view the violence, perpetrators, and their Mums, and having to find mental resolution to deal with unwanted requests by their Dads for contact with them.

This list of additional 'risks' to KNR tamariki is far from exhaustive. However, both in relation to each KNR tamaiti and as a collective snapshot of what tamariki experience, the risk data captured by the child-specific risk and needs assessment shows how violence permeates multiple areas of children's lives, and acts as the common core of their consequent fear, displacement, homelessness, loss of connection, loss of hobbies and interests, loss of whānau, loss of identity, and loss of freedom. The following diagram (Page 61) draws on examples from randomly selected Recordbase files, of tamariki aged 5-12 years old, to show how these disparate impacts are linked back to the family violence.

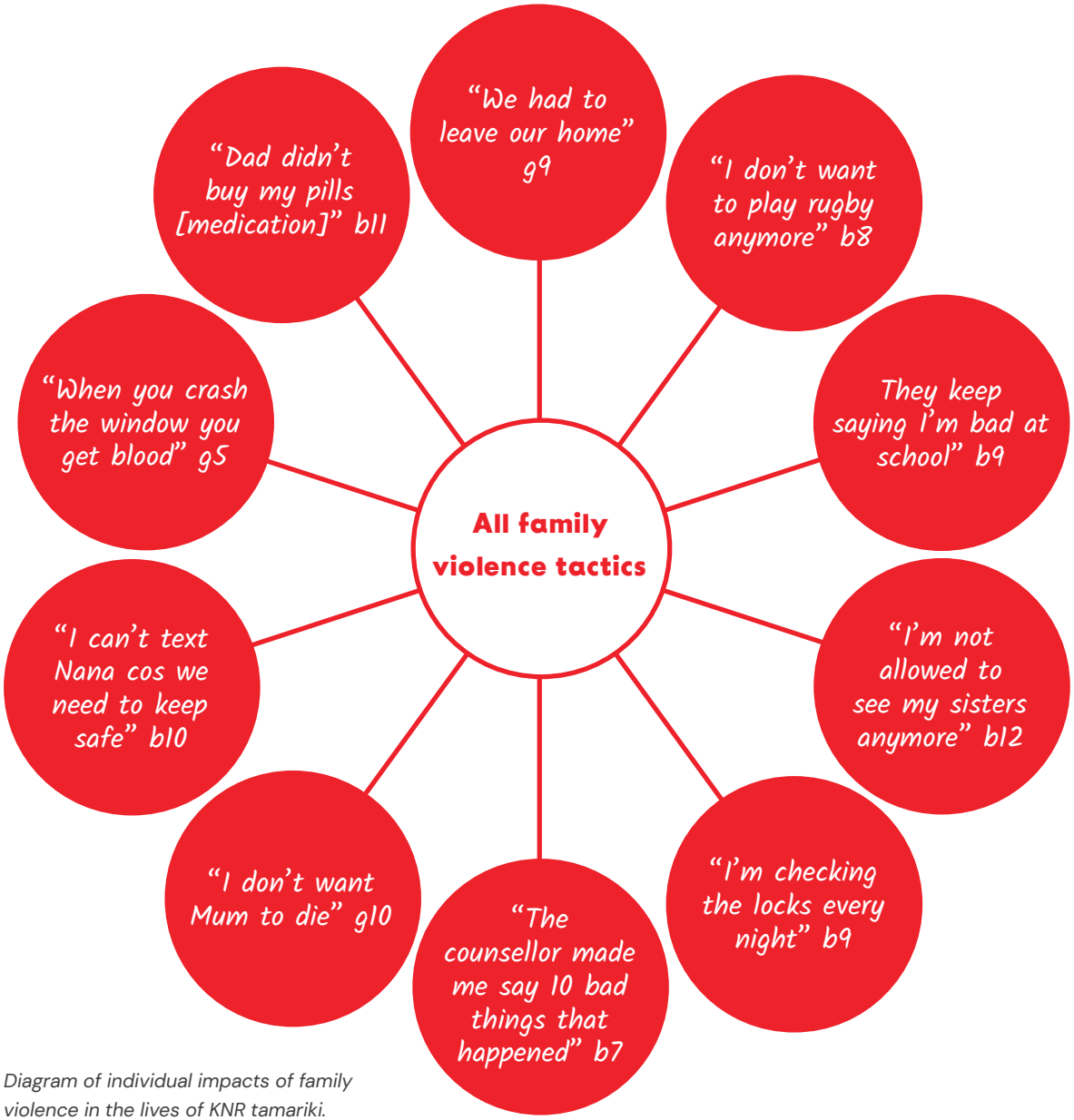


Diagram of individual impacts of family violence in the lives of KNR tamariki.

The changes to Refuge practice, Refuge preparedness, and Refuge capacity evidenced throughout this part of the findings offer two key insights. First, they highlight how tamariki are a special and typically under-served client group whose needs are different to those of adults, and for whom practice needs to be tailored and approached in different ways. Second, they demonstrate that embedding a model of practice that is specialised for family violence safety work is premised on the linking of both individual-level and systems-level advocacy: getting other professionals and services on the same page about what tamariki needed to be safe from family violence was a core component of the Kaiārahi Tamariki advocacy role.

5. How Kōkihi ngā Rito made tamariki safer

What safety meant to tamariki

In this section, we set out how the different components of safety experienced by tamariki in Kōkihi ngā Rito (KNR) converge to create safety that will outlast the involvement of Refuge in their lives. The components of 'safety' were what tamariki, Mums, Kaiārahi Tamariki (KT), and other Refuge kaimahi all spoke most about. We found significant commonalities between and across participant groups in themes relating to how advocacy fostered sustained and significant safety for tamariki. These themes are:

- **Whanaungatanga and relationship-building;**
- **Child-led support: treating tamariki as clients in their own right;**
- **Flexible, reliable, and open-ended support;**
- **Working with whānau; and**
- **Hearing and elevating the voices of children in helping systems.**

As suggested in the introduction to the findings section, these features of practice can be viewed as positive in any service context, but for KNR, they function as purposeful and synergistic advancements in the overall goal of greater safety for tamariki.

To introduce the concept of tangible safety as it relates to tamariki, we begin with the work most explicitly about safety; i.e. safety planning with tamariki, in preparation for critical risk situations. Tamariki (and KT) spoke a lot about safety plans, pointing out that safety work needed to work *for children* – not for adults. Abbie (14) underlined the distinction: *"she just put it in a way that I understand, whereas everyone else had just said the same thing about danger, but that is too broad"*. Safety planning, to her, needed to be both detailed and practicable for it to actually achieve safety.

Her KT similarly discussed Abbie and her Mum's experiences with safety planning with generalist organisations, and the shortfalls in what safety this could realistically provide.

> *It is 5pm on a Friday, [the social worker] says 'I did a safety plan, tick, we will talk to you on Monday'. Mum said to him, 'okay well if something happens can I ring you on the weekend?' because everyone closes in 25 minutes at 5.30 and no one is back until 9 o'clock Monday. So, 'who keeps us safe between now and Monday morning?' and he is like 'no I don't work on the weekend' and she is like 'exactly, that doesn't create safety for my children'. – KT*

Similarly, one Mum described how a detailed, practical plan increased her son's knowledge of safety pathways and, accordingly, his confidence in his ability to be and feel safe.

> ***My son had 'call the police' on his safety plan, but he thought the police 'finished work' [at 5pm] and went home. Like, I know that the police are there 24/7, but he didn't. So [KT] took him through a police station and they just told him random facts of things that you take for granted as an adult, like telling him how many police there were in town, how many cars there were, that they're there 24/7, they have their dinner there, and they don't go to sleep there, they go home and sleep and a new policeman comes in. Stuff like that, which I don't think to tell my kids. But for my [my son], 'calling the police' didn't feel safe [because he] is thinking they'll be asleep. So very practical, right, he is scared, so we will take him into the people that will help you when you are scared, and get them to tell him.*** *– Mum*

We found KT were creative and committed to adapting safety plans to make them practicable for every individual child; one reflects that she *"changed her programme to suit each kid"*. The importance of this individual tailoring was echoed by one Mum below.

> *[KT] is like, 'right, this family needs safety so what do we offer', because **making a safety plan for Mum is very different to making a safety plan for a five-year-old**. Like she could [make a plan] in terms that they understood, whereas I wasn't in a frame of mind to do that, like I was literally thinking of real safety, like 'how am I going to break this down to you?' Whereas [KT] could do that with [both of] them. They both had their plans. – Mum*

She added that Women's Refuge was uniquely equipped to provide the follow-through practical aspects of safety; as she put it, *"the services that wrap around Refuge, like the [Whānau Protect[11]] alarm, like you push the button and the Police come."*

Every child that was interviewed could list who their safe people are, which we found was testament to what had been discussed with and remembered by every single child.

One KT described her *"cheeky"* method for practicing safety planning, saying *"sometime when I pick the kids up from school, I don't let them in the van till they can recite parts of their safety plans."* She went on to list other methods she drew on, including *"making songs about their safety plans, and some kids connect with poems, so they remember them that way too"*. Other KT added their methods, like using games and other creative tools. Interestingly, we found this targeted, tailored approach to safety planning with tamariki had been successful to the extent that Refuge kaimahi outside of the pilot were introducing it into their practice.

> *They have seen the growth in the kids who have come in and they see the value of the pilot. So, they now see the value of considering [tamariki] in their risk assessments and their safety plans. – KT*

We found the input of tamariki generated a straightforward conclusion: safety planning delivered in child-led, child appropriate ways makes children feel safer.

However, safety planning, while vital, was only one segment of holistic safety for tamariki, and its effectiveness was dependent on KT first establishing a secure basis of advocacy with tamariki and their whānau. In the remaining findings sections, the infrastructure required for safety to be a truly achievable and sustainable goal is detailed and explained.

We found the input of tamariki generated a straightforward conclusion: safety planning delivered in child-led, child appropriate ways makes children feel safer.

11. Whānau Protect is a home security and upgrade service offering alarms that initiate an immediate Police response when activated. https://womensrefuge.org.nz/about-us/whanau-protect/

Before Refuge:

Right Now:

Whanaungatanga and relationship-building

Tamariki spent much of their interviews musing over the attributes and dynamics that made them like their KT trust them, and want to see them again – in other words, the process by which they came to know and be known by their KT.

Of the tamariki who participated in interviews, most named similar micro-indicators of friendliness and trustworthiness. 'Warmth' (smiling, kindness, being pleased to see the tamaiti) was the most frequently cited, followed by 'fun' (playing games, laughing, and joking), and 'listening' (listening, hearing, understanding'). Finally, 'good to talk to', 'not judging', and 'spending time' were each emphasised by multiple tamariki when reflecting on how they got to know their KT.

> *She is kind. She is fun. She is lovely. – Clara 7*
>
> *Yes, she was smiling...my safe people are Grandad, Grandma, [KT], and Taika. [The best thing is] feeding us, and colouring in. I'm happy we were here. – Hana 5*
>
> *[We] had blueberries and playing games together. – Manaia 8*
>
> ***I just felt like she always understood my feelings.. [and] I knew I couldn't upset her.** – Abbie 14*
>
> ***Best thing about her is she doesn't judge, [I] never ever feel judged.** – Hunter 12*

Manu (8) and his brother Ace (6) described a fun memory they shared with their KT. Clearly excited, they interjected to chime into the story, and eventually talked over the top of each other to tell us about the day:

> *She got us Christmas presents at the safe house'. '[We watched] the Christmas festival'. 'Then we saw Santa, but he wasn't real Santa'. 'We were getting a drink and they were dropping so much candy'. 'I remember we saw the elves and the gingerbreads. [I felt] happy, very happy'.*

Other tamariki were equally animated when reporting how the relationships they formed with their KT were beneficial and meaningful for them. They were each asked a variation of the questions 'do you feel [KT] was on your team?', or 'do you think [KT] had your back?'

> ***Absolutely. She helped us with the problem with our dad... she is amazing, she is very good at talking with children. She is a nice woman.** – Corey 9*
>
> *She likes to help us, sometimes when we are stuck or something. [Pretending to talk to KT] 'you are so amazing'. She makes us feel good! – Ace 6*
>
> *Yes, she always had my back...she always smiles at me. She was lots of fun, and just letting me know that she really wants to see how I feel and how many friends I have...she was a good person to be talking to, and eating with, and playing games with. She is always smiling. – Manaia 8*

Hana is five years old, and when asked how she knew her KT was listening, she replied: "cause she waits her turn, and then we listen to her." Other tamariki (right across the age-range) give similar explanations of what 'listening' really meant to them – it encompassed inviting, hearing, listening, understanding, and knowing. **Children said that *"you know when you are in that room, it is safe, which is important"*, that the KT *"knows me best, I love to go see her every week"*, and that *"she definitely listened."***

The tamariki participants rated how easily they could talk to their KT, how well their KT listened to them, and how much they felt their KT was on their team. Their ratings are testament to the strength of their relationships with KT and their sense of being truly listened to, validated, and supported by those relationships.


How easy was it to talk to ?


How well did listen to you?

Mums' explanations of the relationships between their tamariki and KT underlined both the individuality of how these were formed and the parallels between their experiences. Two acknowledged the change to their sons' physical demeanours after seeing their KT, saying "*he almost comes alive talking to her*" and "*he would stand up a little taller after seeing her*".

Other Mums talked about how that relationship morphed into whatever role their child most needed to be filled, saying "*it's that friendship, especially for my son… he is very much on his own*", "*he hasn't had many others that will spend that time with him*", and "*I think she would be the only adult outside of family that they could actually talk to.*" They considered the strength of those relationships to be in part attributable to KT adaptability. Finally, one Mum commented that the dedicated support was on par with that offered to adults doing equivalent safety work.

> *At Refuge you kind of have a person or two people, you feel safe here, protected, I think even for kids. In a situation like this they need safety, security and that same consistency. [My child] got offered that here. – Mum*

For some, these trusting relationships took time to grow and thrive, in part due to Mums' hesitation about welcoming potentially harmful interventions or unresponsive systems. One Mum alluded to her scepticism and distrust of yet another service purporting to help.

> ***I will be honest, at first when [KT] introduced herself, like when she was saying that she was here for the kids, like at first I was, I don't know how to say it, I was unsure, I thought, she was going to take my kids away. Then she explained her role – she was here to advocate for the kids and [I was] like 'okay!'*** *– Mum*

In their interviews, Kaiārahi Tamariki also explained how they established those relationships with kids and their Mums.

You are having a conversation; you are trying to make that person feel okay. Bottom line, that person is like calmer or more at ease because you have talked to them or you have heard them or validated them, that is a win and that is like the seed for all of the next interactions you are going to have. Because first impressions do count, and people are not going to be willing to talk to you if you are going to be another one of those practitioners that have minimised them. – KT

The conversations we are having [about violence], you know, you can get a baseline rapport and they tell you about their day and stuff, but the kind of stuff that we are talking about, it is not something all kids [just] offer without the warm-up. – KT

***It is the time to build the rapport, to hear their voice from their mouth, not what their parents think, or their grandma, or their schoolteacher, or [someone] they had one session with.** – KT*

As their quotes illustrate, KT made the point that relationship-building with tamariki needed to be intentional, not simply incidental. Whanaungatanga represented the possibility of future advocacy and safety – it shaped the tone of subsequent interactions and influenced how positive the service experience was likely to be for tamariki and their whānau.

Child-led: support for tamariki as clients in their own right

There was general consensus amongst tamariki and their Mums that KNR was important because it was *"just for kids"*. Fourteen-year-old Abbie explained why that distinction was important to her:

Mum obviously cared [about me], but she had other kids who also needed to talk to her and stuff like that. And also, she was going through her own stuff. – Abbie 14

Kids and their Mums talked about the need for support to be reliable and consistent. For tamariki, who are inherently dependent on the decisions of adults, 'proving' reliability and consistency was a crucial aspect of building trust and addressing risk. Five-year-old Hana's standout feature of her KNR, for example, was that her KT *"is always picking us up after school, she takes us to our after-school things"*. Mums offered similar feedback; the dedication of KT and commitment to making it work for every individual child was highly praised.

It is more than just a programme that you offer a child for one hour or whatever it is. [KNR] is so much more than that, because it is almost 24/7 support. – Mum

I just think [KT] is fantastic at her job. I cannot speak highly enough of her, like the way she has helped our family. – Mum

I think [his KT] genuinely cares, like she does care what happens to the kids and she has fun with them. But I think trust, like, they can depend on her: if [KT] says she is going to meet you, she is going to meet you. We've had a lot of trouble before with [my son because] he would get all ready like '[my worker] is coming to see me today'. So, he would work it all out [thinking] 'I am going to tell [my worker] this'...like all the things that have happened to him, and he's sitting there and I'm like ready to tell and then they cancelled and didn't turn up. – Mum

Similarly, KT discussed the importance of having consistently transparent conversations with their clients, especially as it related to building trust.

> *Their trust is so much purer because, I say 'oh yeah I will do this and you do this' and then I say 'I will let you know next session or, I can ring you on Mum's phone' and then it is not like they are hearing it through Mum. I am feeding directly back to them, and I think that is so powerful because, I had one client that was like 'oh yeah that is what [all workers] say', you know. Then the change in those conversations that we had she is like 'oh you do just actually tell me' and I'm like 'yeah and I always will', but [building that trust] takes time, especially when they have been in the system for a long time, you know. - KT*

> *[Tamariki] are the first to know the updates and stuff and I think that is probably the biggest win or the most powerful thing for them. They kind of feel like they have someone that is in their corner. – KT*

Tamariki also commented on who chose or led the content of their sessions, and how they safely talked about topics that might feel "yucky". **Hunter (12) perfectly captured how he was supported to feel in control of the depth and focus of his work with his KT, saying *"both of us decide. It's like we're telepathic. Because we normally have the same ideas."*** Hunter and his KT were interviewed separately from each other, on different days and in different towns, yet described their work together in an almost identical way.

> *Over time you just form the same [ideas] because you listen to them so much and you are effectively their voice, you know what they are thinking. So sometimes if you say 'do you want me to do that for you?', they go 'how do you know?', I'm like 'because that is my job, I should be able to', like, 'you want this so badly, this is how we can get that across'. – Hunter's KT*

Hunter (12) perfectly captured how he was supported to feel in control of the depth and focus of his work with his KT, saying *"both of us decide. It's like we're telepathic. Because we normally have the same ideas."*

Tamariki were all asked variations of *"who did the choosing?"* Clara, who is seven, was quiet for the first part of her interview. When asked about choice, she sat up suddenly from her spot on the floor with the board game, and announced it was *"me, and Corey, and [KT]"*. Other tamariki gave similar examples of how they were encouraged to choose and lead their work together, saying their KT "*always made sure I felt like I could say no*" and "*asked me if I was okay to talk about [Dad].*"

KT documented exactly how kids were preoccupied with risk, including notes such as *"he is going to try and sleep with all the doors open so that his imagination doesn't make up monsters"* (9-year-old boy) and *"I like being close to you, you make me feel safe"* (6-year-old girl).

Examples of the 'goals' added by KT to their Recordbase files further show how KT were led by whatever was at the forefront of children's minds – and therefore what 'safety' meant to them. These goals included, for instance *"he would like me to continue to be kind to him"* (10-year-old boy) and *"support me in places I don't feel comfortable"* (10-year-old boy).

Abbie (14), in particular offered a compelling example of how the very purpose of advocacy was left open for her to lead:

> *She would always start off with like 'I am going to help you but is there anything like you want to come in not knowing and leave having the skills to do?' – Abbie*

Abbie explained that, other times, her KT would *"read the room"* and take the burden off Abbie by saying *"'I really want to help you with this, so I am going to teach you it so you have it for the future'"*. Abbie felt that, unlike in group programmes that *"had sessions planned out"*, her KT would sometimes simply say *"I want you to tell me how your week has been"* so she *"got to talk"*. Abbie's KT reinforced this emphasis on being child-led, stating *"When we say 'child-led', that is what I believe it to be - you listen more than you talk at first, like that is just how it is."* Another child's Mum summarised the child-led nature of KT practice by saying "*with the child focus, it is all up to the kids, it's all on their terms.*".

The topic of closing support for tamariki was raised by all participants. It was often referred to as a continuation of child-led advocacy; one KT described it as *"an in depth, long term, transition period"*, another as having *"a wavering door policy"* that opened and closed based on each tamaiti. Kaimahi at one pilot Refuge commented that this approach means *"just feeling like you had someone, even if you never used them [again], it is nice to know someone was there if you needed them"*. Tamariki also discussed the different ways they paused, ended, or returned to KNR, and how this was always on their terms. We asked Hunter (12) what would happen if he needed support again, and he replied *"she [KT] said I can come back any time."*

Abbie (14), too, referred to a time earlier in her KNR journey when they had planned to close and she decided she was not yet ready. Later, when she felt ready, they had a celebration where *"I took my family out for food with [KT]... it was like a family thing as well, like a lot of people, I enjoyed it."* She found the 'wavering door' system of KNR reassuring, and liked that *"[KT] didn't make it feel like once it is over, it is done...so it was, like, if I needed to, I always felt like I could talk to her again"*.

When seven-year-old Taika 'closed' with KNR, he said "*I feel safe and happy, but I feel sad about leaving.*" His KT worked with him on his trepidation about closing and they planned for gradual closure and continued support. Other KT mentioned similar themes about the careful management of closure and the tensions tamariki experience when support is ending.

> *I had a boy on Kōkihi and I know he was really sporty, rugby, I took it upon myself to put him onto [a rugby coach] because he is a positive male role model. Yeah, I think that was a big win because... I slowly transitioned him into [it], I didn't just like send him there. I went with him to meet him, and it has been a success story because he has made it into the top rugby teams and now I have seen him in the newspaper. So, it has been like 'wow you are doing so great' and I still keep in contact with him to see how he is going, and he always comes and says hello when I see him around. – KT*

Mums experienced similar concerns about the ending of support for both their tamariki and themselves, and worked with the KT to make sure it was a positive and child-led process.

> *I have been thinking about for a while when this ends it is probably going to be very traumatic for [my kids]...we will have to do something like maybe a bit like a transition, sort of thing, so they still feel like they have control of it. Definitely we will have to do something, probably even for me. – Mum*

The experiences of tamariki participants epitomised 'child-led' and 'whole-of-whānau' practice. Through their work together with KT, they developed a mutual understanding of advocacy goals, their risks and needs, and their hopes and wishes. Tamariki led every stage of their engagement; 'child-led' was manifest through communication, consistency, transparency, choice, consent, and respect for their evolving requirements, preferences, and capacities.

Flexible, reliable, and open-ended support

Both Mums and tamariki were adamant that a key feature of KNR was the lack of the restrictions on service time, pace, and end-point. Both groups of participants found comfort and reassurance in the fact that support for tamariki continued until tamariki felt they no longer needed it. This, they pointed out, is contrary to other forms of support they had accessed thus far in their journeys after violence.

Prior to KNR, 14-year-old Abbie had taken part in group programmes. She reflected that they had a *"set time"* that ultimately meant the group *"didn't have a lot of time."* She pointed out that for someone her age, 'need' is dynamic and unpredictable. Part of what made KNR feel like a 'safe' prospect for Abbie was the knowledge that it was equally dynamic in response to her needs and could evolve in parallel with her.

> ***It made me feel a lot better knowing there was no time limit on it I guess, because I didn't know obviously what was going to happen in the future. It made me feel like if anything were to happen, I have like more than one person to talk to.*** *– Abbie, 14*

Aside from giving kids the confidence and certainty that KNR would not vanish when they needed it most, having an open-ended service allowed tamariki more space to choose the pace of trust-building and ultimately the disclosures of their family violence experiences.

> *They did [another programme], it is short... whereas they only say what they feel comfortable saying with [KT] or whatever, but that has gone on for so long that she is like their friend. – Mum*

> *I think because they felt ready to say something that is when they actually wanted to say something, and I don't think you would probably get that if you were to actually ask them either. I know, well some of the stuff didn't come out until [the second year]. – Mum*

Several Mums pinpointed that the open-ended and flexible design meant tamariki had control over the pace of work they did with KT. As a result, many of them developed such trust in and comfort with their KT that they shared previously untold stories and secrets.

> ***She made a lot of disclosures here that she never made to me and then I think too she made disclosures and because then they got dealt with, they went further.*** *– Mum*

It is not so clinical feeling...even though there is no [direct] prompting and all that kind of stuff [the KT] managed to bring things out that they wouldn't even discuss with me, things like I had no idea about, or any other agency, that were actually very sad... without that, without [KT], we would probably never have known. - Mum

The Kaiarāhi Tamariki felt the same. They appeared to be accustomed to defending the need to utilise a slower-paced, more holistic approach, and all relayed a similar rationale: that kids respond better without *"confined timeframes"*, that it makes it *"totally child-led, which is unique and you don't see it anywhere else"*, that it is *"more organic and you get better outcomes that way"*, that *"kids share when they feel comfortable"*, and that *"it is all about hearing their voice, listening to them"*.

Other kaimahi at the pilot Refuges talked about how they perceived the benefits of KNR and the in-depth, long-term support it offers tamariki. They compared this to what would be offered to children if KNR didn't exist – which would be constrained by their limited time and staffing capacity.

[Thanks to KNR] we're like well hang on a minute, actually this child needs this, this and this. We obviously can't give that to them, so let's see what we can do and then talk with [KT]. Whereas obviously before [KNR] that would never have crossed our minds. So, we would probably never have taken into account the extra things that [tamariki] need. We would probably have been frustrated at the end of the programme, like we have given him everything that we have, but we haven't got everything that he needs. – *Refuge Kaimahi*

I feel blessed that we have got the right person to work with the children in a way that is supportive, and there are no timeframes, and that they have got the voice and got the resources to support that. – Manager

Like so many of the service components children regarded as safety-promoting, flexibility of approach was one finding that at face value seemed like a generic positive. However, we found that it also played a far more influential role in countering insidious impacts of family violence on children, such as powerlessness, loss of control, and unpredictability. Giving tamariki power to choose, after they experienced so much loss of this control, was something tamariki focused on a lot in their interviews.

Six-year-old Ace is a prime example. He gave an enthusiastic litany of the activities he did together with his KT, saying *"there's heaps of things...we had pizza and then we went to the park"*, and *"when we go somewhere she buys us food"*, and *"we just talk about stuff...and play some games"*. Other tamariki also talked about flexibility of place and time, saying *'we did [KNR] at school'*, or *'[KT] came here to our house'*, or *'we went to the skatepark'*, or *'we went on drives'*.

Abbie (14) favourably compared the flexibility of structure within KNR to other counselling-type services, pointing out that even when running low on emotional capacity, she knew her KT would adjust what they did accordingly.

If I have just finished school and I am over it for the day I would still come here because I guess [KT] made it feel like it wasn't a task. – *Abbie 14*

Abbie went on to explain how it was different to her past experiences of support:

> *I had been to two different counsellors before I started seeing [KT]. So, they were both, like they would both sit in one room, and one was like at a doctors so it felt a lot more like serious and then the other one was some random place, I'm not even sure. I just think it felt very serious and like they would write everything down... [However, My KT] she wouldn't ask like question after question. After she would ask a question, she would let me talk for however long I needed to... she would always make it interesting and just like see how I felt that week, instead of always like planning so much ahead. – Abbie 14*

Mums spoke about encountering waiting lists at other services, describing this as disheartening and dangerous. In contrast, they regarded the flexibility for KT to have five-minute conversations at short notice, or to quickly extend or add sessions, as enabling their children to get that support at exactly the times they most needed it.

> *Something triggers [my daughter] and she is like 'I'm losing it, I don't want to talk to my Mum', she doesn't want to go to the doctor. But she will come down [to Refuge] or meet [KT] somewhere. So, the fact that this programme doesn't have the 15-minute time slot, it's amazing. – Mum*

> *We found like with [other services] I think it was like a nine-month waitlist, and in the meantime, they offer nothing. Like that is massive, for kids that could be a suicide risk, they could be severely depressed, self-harming, anything. [KT] is my go-to person and she [always] makes time for us. If I ring and be like '[my child] is not feeling good', she won't say 'I'll see them in two weeks', she will be like 'no I'm seeing them this afternoon'. – Mum*

A downside of this flexible approach, raised by Refuge participant groups, was the change in capacity required to sustain responsiveness. Extending the flexible approach to include after-hours crisis moments and the time to respond to the fluctuating needs of tamariki clients has thus far been contingent on the willingness and efforts of individual KT. As they are each the sole KT at their Refuge there are few ways for them to redistribute the capacity demands they face in their roles.

Working with whānau

Whānau were welcomed into the design of support for tamariki. **Kaiārahi Tamariki recognised that safety is strengthened when children were supported in ways that included their trusted, chosen, and important people, and in ways that offered tamariki safe opportunities to explore and voice their complex and often contradictory feelings about their Dads.**

The Recordbase files of the 18 randomly selected tamariki showed the involvement of grandmothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, siblings, Mums' friends, coaches, and teachers whose roles were so proximal to tamariki that they became, as one KT put it, *"part of their whakapapa"*. However, the most mahi with whānau across all pilot Refuges was with the Mums of the tamariki, with tamariki at the centre of that work.

At the time that tamariki began their individual journeys with Kōkihi ngā Rito (KNR), their Mums were also engaged with Refuge services. Manu, who is 8-years-old, stayed in a Refuge safehouse with his Mum and his younger brother. In his interview with researchers, he was asked: *"When you went to Refuge, what did you need?"*, he simply replied, *"Mum"*. His 6-year-old brother Ace said, *"Mum is our safe person"*. Similarly, recorded on the risk and needs assessment of one five-year-old-girl was a statement she made to her KT about her Mum's role in making her feel safe: *"Mum rocked me back to sleep, she gives me kisses and cuddles"*.


How much did and Refuge help your mum?


How much did and Refuge help your whānau?

In their interviews, Mums also talked about the symbiotic nature of their relationships with their tamariki in the road to safety and recovery from family violence, explaining that their wairua fluctuated in tandem with and flowed into the wairua of their children. **As one Mum put it, her own and her child's "*wairua are always connected*". Her sentiment was echoed by her son, who said simply "*Mum is good now and I am good!*" Kids shared their Mums' visions of a content and mutually caring family dynamic; they talked about "*all looking out for each other*" and "*checking on each other.*"** Being able to care for their Mums and siblings, in addition to being cared for by them, appeared vital to their positive self-perception and their construction of identity and whānau role.

At the same time, some Mums referred to the enormous weight of responsibility for restoring ora for their children after their tapu (in conjunction with their own) was violated. Their maternal strength, constant responsiveness to, and practical care for their tamariki, day in, day out, month after month, and year after year, took a toll on their wairua at the same time as it built up and maintained the wairua of their tamariki.

From interviews with Mums and KT, we found that one 'point of difference' in KNR practice was a paradigm shift in who the primary and secondary clients were recognised to be. KT explained that in their Refuge practice, wāhine are ordinarily the primary recipients of support, and one small component of the support they receive may relate to their children and their Māmā role. Conversely, in KNR, tamariki were the primary recipients of support, and much of the advocacy for those tamariki involved their Mums – in their role as Mums. We found from our Recordbase review that support Mums received as part of advocacy for their tamariki often outlasted the support they received as Refuge clients themselves.

> *Advocating for the tamaiti is advocating for Mums, and vice versa. – KT*

> *I think it is probably the only place you go to that you and your children are involved in, like when I would see a different counsellor, they never met my children. – Mum*

> *Now I feel I am going to work with women to better the children in those women's lives. My focus has changed. – Manager*

The reconceptualised version of Mum's involvement in child advocacy was considered complementary to services wāhine accessed as primary clients, and set the scene for longer-term safety for their children. **KT believed that when Mums are the primary (and often sole) long-term provider of physical, emotional, and social safety for tamariki, unburdening their wairua by boosting their capacity and energy to parent and maximising their access to resources and support represented safety for tamariki long beyond the limits of their own involvement with the whānau.** From the 18 randomly selected Recordbase files of KNR tamariki, we found over 300 examples of practical support aimed at unburdening the Mums of KNR tamariki. Some examples include:

- Providing food parcels;
- Initiating transparent communication;
- Organising accommodation options;
- Making referrals for specialists;
- Supporting with family court;
- Following up with all agencies;
- Returning children in positive moods;
- Practising things with kids so Mum does not have to;
- Initiating difficult conversations with tamariki and Mums about violence;
- Exploring whānau issues;

- Being receptive to all phone calls and questions from Mums regarding their children;
- Building Mums' confidence;
- Picking tamariki up from school;
- Taking tamariki to training, and extracurricular activities (sometimes on the weekend);
- Financing gymnastics, rugby boots, dancing, and camps;
- Supporting with strengthening security in their houses;
- Supporting with difficult behaviours;
- Supporting with daily routines;
- Making sure family violence history is recorded and included in family court processes;
- Providing information about how Mum provides safety and day to day care of children for child protection hui;
- Exploring family violence and drawing out Mums' strengths;
- Connecting the key workers of children and Mums for continuity and consistency of support.

Outcomes of the support given to Mums include increased trust and confidence in KT, increased parenting confidence and parenting authority, increased capacity to respond to and meet children's emotional needs after violence, reduced material and practical barriers to household stability, and greater awareness of their own strengths and their options for support.

In their interviews, Mums described the support as both meaningful to them individually and transformative for their parenting capacity.

> *When you have got someone so supportive as [KT] and so informative, I probably learnt just as much as [my son]. – Mum*

> *Just having the support for me, like, I don't know if I would still be fighting the good fight, like, especially right at the beginning. – Mum*

> *Like [KT] always said what she was doing, or how, or what day, or what time, and then she'd drop him back to school. So, I always knew exactly what was going on which was massive when you feel like you have no control over a lot of things. – Mum*

> *We are so lucky. Just knowing that I've got her too and quite often I just text. She is amazingly up front and that is why it is so easy to talk to her. – Mum*

An outcome that Mums conveyed as highly significant to them was the opportunity for some kind of respite from the relentless mental workload of parenting in a context of constant stress and pressure. Mums shared that being the main (and often sole) provider of support for their children was exhausting, especially having survived violence, and constantly battling the seemingly never-ending continuation of both the abuse and its impacts. In short, while endlessly feeding the wairua of their tamariki, there were very few sources from which to feed their own.

> *I think things would be quite different [without KNR]. I don't think we would be where we are now. I think I would have had to pull out of all the court stuff, to 100 percent put everything I've got into just [my son], because I just don't have the fight for both. – Mum*

Likewise, after enduring situations of violence alongside their mothers, tamariki understood the benefit of having a bit of space. Hunter (12) labelled it "time for just me". Manaia (8) agreed, explaining how being with his KT was good for ***"letting [Mum and I] have breaks when we are not together and having some time alone and then we can have some time being two."*** His Mum laughed and seconded his comment, saying "yeah, then you could go out, it was intense back then."

When I'm right at the end I'm like, [the break means] I know I can get through the next week. – Mum

Sometimes for that hour and half [KT] had him it would mean I could just sort of breathe, maybe do something very small for me that gave me that extra, so that when I picked him up from school I was one hundred percent. – Mum

It would have been awesome maybe him even having [an] extra hour a week, but I know there are so many kids in need, it would give people like me that little bit, I don't even know what to call it, but strength to keep going. *– Mum*

This respite time functioned as more than simply childminding; it opened up the potential to mitigate one of the most draining impacts of family violence on their whānau capacity by offering Mums a small chance to rest, re-set, and re-fuel – while knowing their children were safe and nurtured elsewhere with someone who by then was often regarded as tantamount to whānau.

Another way KT combated (and arguably reversed) specific impacts of violence and helped to restore whānau capacity and stability was by purposefully naming and reflecting Mums' parenting strengths.

Examples of Recordbase casenotes documenting these include:

- ***Mum plays the main role for [tamariki], she keeps them warm, fed, housed, she takes them to school, she packs their lunch, she comforts them, laughs with them, she advocates for them, she is everything for them.***
- *Mum managed to get her children to three different schools every morning, even with physical injuries from the violence.*
- *I have also said to [Mum] that she is such a strong woman, and she is an incredible parent to the kids and although she feels like all she gets is criticised. I have also said that she is doing an amazing job and she should be so proud.*
- *[Tamaiti] is confident talking to Mum, feels safe and loved with Mum, and loves living with Mum.*
- *I have praised [Mum's] on-going protective parenting of the children and acknowledged that it must be so difficult for her but the strength and safety she provides the kids is amazing.*
- *Mum is also doing everything in her power to help [tamariki] move forward.*

KT reflected that identifying and naming the strengths of Mums had dual benefits: growing Mums' confidence *and* showcasing Mums' intentional and extensive protectiveness of their children – to KT themselves, to Mums' support people, and to other services.

[Mums] sit there, and I highlight some of their strengths, it can be quite awkward. But when you are highlighting them in a way that it is about the safety that they are providing for their tamariki, they are a lot more receptive to the compliment. When you can highlight those strengths as a safety [action] then it dawns on them, and they don't feel like they have ruined their kids. – KT

So probably just them realising like what an incredible Mum they are and like they are not to blame...She was always doing a good job, she just didn't know it. She was always really down on herself. – KT

Mums spoke about how it felt to have those successes and strengths named to them, and to be consistently validated in their parenting roles.

I'm heard, and like, you always leave the end of the conversation feeling like you are actually doing the right things. It might not feel that way, and it may feel like the judge and the lawyers and everyone are not seeing things correctly, but it doesn't mean that you are in the wrong. It is just so massive. – Mum

You always leave better off, like, emotionally whether it is just the [KT's] help and them listening to you, which sometimes is the only person that hears you. – *Mum*

I am still here fighting for this. Otherwise, it could be bleakness and 'F the system', but [KT] is, like, always telling me 'you are doing a great job'. – *Mum*

Mums were often plagued by self-doubt about their parenting decisions and skills.

My confidence as a Mum changed because of [KT], I will never be the same after meeting her, in a positive empowering way. I am getting emotional; I can't say how much I love her. – *Mum*

Finally, I didn't feel completely alone and that is huge. Yeah, they say it takes a village to raise a child, she is part of the village. – *Mum*

[KNR and my son's KT] was just like having a connector that understood [my son] and how to talk to him in a nurturing and encouraging way and just the connector really for me. It was like she was holding our hand going like this [imitates holding hands] bringing us back together. – *Mum*

Through their relationships with KT, Mums were able to acknowledge how pivotal they had already been in facilitating greater safety for their tamariki – in contrast to their previous views of themselves as detracting from their children's safety. Their improved confidence in their own parenting and the certainty in their decision-making positively benefited their sense of connectedness between them and their tamariki.

A KT described her *"greatest win"* with a Mum, who started off believing that her situation was so bad that she deserved to have her tamariki removed from her care. The KT explains that she was able to unpack Mum's anxiety around her own victimisation and its impacts on her parenting capacity.

When I spoke with [Mum], it wasn't [that] big what was going on. It wasn't great, but it wasn't big, it wasn't [child removal] level stuff. So just guiding her through that and having her ring me whenever she needed to. Just advocating for Mum to know she is actually doing a bloody good job... it was still advocating for the kids, and they are really great now because she has still got her kids. – *KT*

I worked on things [the tamaiti] was really keen to implement at home. Like she said 'can we talk to Mum about that?' so we would invite Mum to the end of the session and we would talk about how that could look at home and they would discuss how they would implement those things at home. It was just really cool to see that spark come back between them mainly because Mum just realised that she was actually doing a good job. – *KT*

Advocating for the tamaiti is advocating for Mums, and vice versa. – *KT*

Case study: 'Put your crown back on'

A Kaiārahi Tamariki spoke about their experience of working with mum during KNR:

"At the start Mum was barely answering my calls and texts and said 'I don't want another advocate', which is so fair enough. She just wants so much for her kids, but she didn't quite trust me with them. So, I spent quite a long time with her, getting to know her and how she has been let down before. She had three past relationships with violent men, and three kids from those. She had tried to seek help so many times, it's actually incredible that she engaged with Refuge for the sake of her kids.

She started picking up the phone more, and now she calls me at least twice a week. When something comes up for her and she is frightened or something, or she is not sure about something about the kids, she knows that I will answer, she knows that I will make time and she wants to come in and debrief with me. I think she hadn't had the offer before to have that. Her experiences of help had been very cold. I was open with her; I saw her strengths and I didn't let her forget them. She had a family group conference and she wanted me there. I made sure she had read and knew exactly what I was going to read out. She knew I was wanting the best for her and her kids, she knew I would speak up for her.

I now see the kids weekly, and she wants her littlest one who has just turned 5 to come to me. I think just even when she comes crying to me I obviously don't turn her away, even if she's not 'my client' because helping her helps her kids. I can point out all the positive and protective things she is doing for her kids, I say 'you are the best, look at all these things you did just in this last week'. I'm like 'put your crown back on'."

Tamariki labelled Dads as integral characters in their stories of violence. Of the 10 participants and the 18 randomly selected tamariki client files, 'Dad' was the perpetrator for 24 tamariki, and for the remaining four the perpetrator was their step-dad, or Mum's partner. All tamariki were aware of who was perpetrating the violence. The following quotes are taken from the 18 anonymised Recordbase files. At only five and six years of age, some of the youngest Kōkihi ngā Rito clients were insightful about how safe Dad was for them and their Mums.

> *I like him at jail because he hurt Mum. – Boy 6*
>
> *He is not a safe person to me, my brother, or Mum. – Girl 6*
>
> *He might hit me and then I'm with my [doll] in the corner. – Girl 5*
>
> *I don't miss dad, don't see him much anyway, he was mean and hurt Mum, he was mean to me sometimes. – Girl 6*

Children's most commonly expressed emotion about Dads was fear, followed by confusion, *"I love Dad even though he is mean", "I don't know how I feel about him being back", "I'm looking forward to seeing him [next] holiday, but I like that he doesn't know where we stay at"*. KT recorded the complexity of tamariki emotions, as well as the hopelessness that was continually felt about Dad's past and often ongoing behaviours; for example, *"I just wish he would try to change"*.

The worry that children expressed about Dad was ever-present but fluctuated in intensity. While pilot Refuges did not work directly with Dads or other perpetrators in person, KT found ways to support tamariki and their whānau, by honouring, envisioning, and processing the significance of Dads, and his role in tamariki identities and lives. In children's files, we identified the following categories of practices relating to the role of Dads for tamariki. These included:

- Holding space to speak about Dad by inviting conversation about him;
- Leading conversations about Dad in purposeful ways;
- Respecting children, their whānau, and their whakapapa;
- Encouraging tamariki to express all their feelings about Dad and validating these;
- Understanding that children's wairua fluctuates in response to Dad and his wairua;
- Discussing the complexity of the multiple 'characters' that Dad represented for children and their confusing feelings of pride, love, and fear;
- Exploring children's personal identity separate to their Dad;
- Exploring whakapapa and positive connections to Dad and Dad's whānau;
- Exploring what whakapapa represents to tamariki, their choices, and their feelings;
- Offering age-appropriate creative outlets to express feelings about Dad (writing poems or letters for and about him, drawing pictures, and using playdough and plasticine to create models depicting behaviours, feelings, and family scenes. Using feelings cards, completing feelings charts, and reading age-appropriate books about family violence and perpetrators);
- Leading discussions about safe and unsafe people;
- Unpacking Dad's violence and exploring the way it presently impacts tamariki and their Mums;
- Exploring tamariki wishes and opinions for and about Dad and their current and future relationships with Dad; and
- Being purposeful when speaking about perpetrator behaviour and accountability for violence

Through the above examples, and as reflected by children's quotes below, the KT approach to working with kids' representations of their Dads honoured the mana of Dads, and reinforced the KNR value Te Tapu o te Tamaiti.

> **We worked on me, who I am, who my whānau is, because my Dad he has a kind Mum, my aunties are cool, the side of my whānau are safe people to me, so I am made up of all that.** – Boy 11

> There's lots of good people and there is just one of him. – Girl 9

> [KT] built her confidence back up, built her trust in the world. If your Dad can do that to you then everyone could do that. Where [KT] has made her realise that he is not the rule like he is the exception to that rule. Like most people are genuinely good people. It made her look at her own circle too. Actually, 'Mum is on my side, grandma and grandad are on my side'. [KT] gave her that confidence to look at her own circle and realise there was one really bad egg in our group, but there are 100 people that are pushing and helping us and are there when we need them. – Mum

Children made it obvious through their comments that when they said they wanted to see their Dad, this came with a strict (and often unheard) caveat. They explained that *"I do want to see him, but not when he lies about pushing me and yelling at me"*, and *"when I see him, he is saying 'Mum is sometimes ugly', and that doesn't make me good"*. One tamaiti explains that he tries to be okay with it even when it feels unsafe, saying *"maybe we try to make it good? If we have to see him anyway, maybe we all try and make it good"*. Another confides that he feels safer when he sees Dad because their contact is legally required to be supervised: *"we see him and my brothers, but only when we go stay up with our Nan"*.

One Mum commented on what had changed throughout her child's involvement with KNR:

> She gets to make the choices now, like she has been asked do you want to see your father, she said no, so we are doing everything in our power to make that happen, where before none of us had choices, they had to go to their dad. – Mum

> I think that is it, they have choices now, like they are in control of this, and I have never said [to them] 'you can't see him'. It is like 'do you want to see him, and how?'. Like we have tried phone calls, stuff like that [instead of in person]. They don't want to see him now, so we fight for that. I think there is a good case there but that gives them that control. We didn't have any control in our lives before. – Mum

By including all safe whānau and consistently focusing on whanaungatanga, KT established trusting and mana-enhancing relationships with whānau (especially Mums) that helped to restore the impacts of family violence. Much of that advocacy occurred without children present but was tacitly acknowledged to be about the tamariki. **In sum, supporting whānau recovery from violence and building up whānau capacity prevented the ripple effect of family violence impacts on the whānau, and by extension, on tamariki themselves. Far from being mutually exclusive, the findings underline why child-centred and whole-of-whānau approaches are mutually complementary (and arguably mutually reinforcing) within family violence safety work.**

Hearing from tamariki about 'safe' whānau

The last section set out the findings relating to Mums, who were the safe and primary parents of Kōkihi ngā Rito (KNR) tamariki, and Dads, who were often the perpetrators of severe (and continuing) family violence in their children's lives. As illustrated throughout the rest of the findings, much of KNR advocacy was predicated on hearing children's stories and elevating their voices, especially within powerful systems that they may not otherwise feel confident, equipped, or welcomed to speak in.

Two siblings participating in KNR talked a lot about the frustration, fear, and futility they felt when 'the system' refused to take the family violence seriously and keep them safe. No matter how much effort they put into articulating what they wanted and trying to make adults hear them, those with the most power to make decisions about them listened instead to the much louder voices of their Dad and Dad's lawyers. The children had to repeatedly think about, document, and convey their thoughts, feelings, and preferences about seeing their father to seven different professionals.

After speaking to so many adults, it was no wonder that when we arrived to speak to them, 7-year-old Clara was hiding away behind the couch. Her older brother Corey (9) popped over to her and we could hear him gently say that it was a good chance to talk all about their KT and the fun things they did. Clara's Mum reminded her that she did not have to participate and gave her the options of staying behind the couch or just watching us play the boardgame instead. Although she decided not to play, she chose a boardgame character *"just because";* then she rolled the dice just to see what it was like, then she read the questions, she opened prizes, she reminisced, she answered questions, she laughed, she told jokes, and she compared her prizes with her brothers. After the interview, we all had dinner and played outside, then it was time for us to go. Clara was once again behind the couch, but this time she was propped up against it in a very long handstand. She was still upside down as she said, *"if you need more help next time I will play again!"*.

The following is a snapshot of their story: their Mum had a protection order prohibiting Dad's contact with her, and this automatically included both children as protected persons. However, although Mum invoked the 'no contact' provision in the protection order, their tamariki did not have the same presumptive right to decline any further contact with their Dad when they felt unsafe. In a family court process instigated by their father, and spanning most their 14-month engagement with KNR, both children said they did not want to see their Dad unless it was supervised, and when they felt safe and strong enough and *"not when he keeps being mean"*.

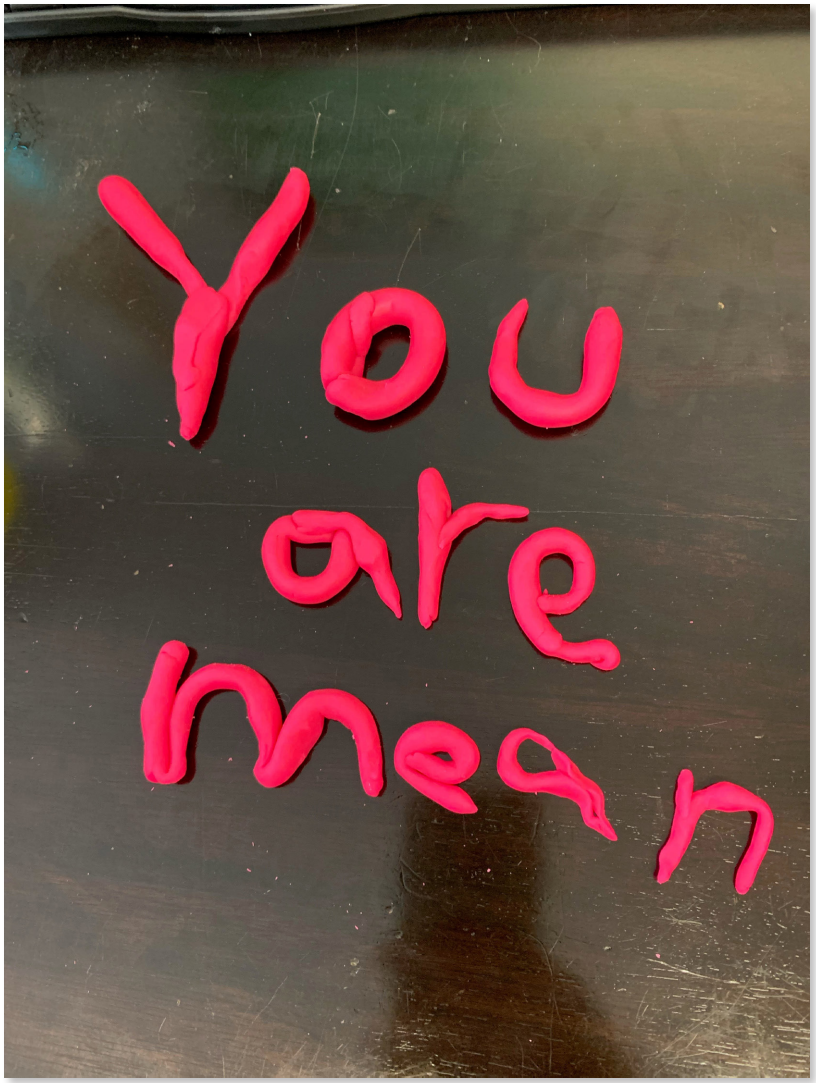
Their wishes were overruled. The family court privileged the parenting 'rights' of their father over their right to safety, and mandated fortnightly visits with their father. Sitting in their lounge, they told us that they had to see their Dad "*because it's the law.*" They looked dejected but were distracted by Mum trying to balance a toy on her head. Twice, the tamariki had returned from access visits with their Dad and disclosed that he had made them feel *"not good",* he had yelled at them, sworn at them, and tried to get them to change their stories about his violence.

The below table sets out the contrast between the actions documented on their files about their Dad's parenting decisions, and the actions documented about their Mums' parenting decisions. The table shows how Mum (almost exclusively) nurtured and parented the children, including in the additional ways they needed her care after they were subjected to their father's violence.

Patently, tamariki wanted to see their dads, but also wanted that only in ways that felt safe to them and which they had some control over. As their Mums so succinctly explained, some had seldom had the choice about or control over the conditions in which they see their Dads in the past. Restoring choice and control for tamariki is vital to their safety now and in the future.

Dad's parenting decisions	Mum's parenting decisions
• He physically assaulted Mum while she was pregnant • He strangled Mum when she was seven months pregnant with their second child • He forced Mum to quit her job after her maternity leave ended • He exposed their children to the violent assaults perpetrated on their Mum, including punching her in the face • He held a knife to their Mum's throat in front of their children • He smashed their children's toys to punish them • He drove dangerously with their children in the car to punish them for 'talking back' • He repeatedly threatened to kill Mum • He threatened to kill the children and told them how he could kill them • He threatened to take their children to live with his Mum • He verbally abused their children • He continued to physically and sexually assault Mum • He threatened to kill himself if their Mum ever left him • He stopped Mum and their children having any access to money and made Mum ask permission for basic essentials • He isolated their children by controlling where they went to school, who their friends were, and the activities they did on the weekends • Upon separation he breached the Protection Order many times • He digitally stalked their children while the no-contact Protection Order was in place • He told their children misinformation about Mum • He made the children scared; they have said they feel unsafe around him and both were diagnosed with PTSD • Dad's pattern of violence is dominated by coercive control and physically violence, such behaviours are often indicators of critical risk of further violence or homicide	• Mum attempted to shelter their children from Dad's physical violence toward her • Mum purchased second-hand toys for the children's room and sent them to their room after dinner so they would not become targets of their Dad's violence • Mum organised for her sister to look after the kids on weekends when she was physically injured from Dad's violence • Mum dropped the kids to school and picked them up every day • Mum hid presents for the children's upcoming birthdays so Dad would not sell or break them • Mum tried to do the things Dad asked of her so that his violence would not escalate and involve them directly • After separation, Mum moved house multiple times to ensure the children can be safe from him • Mum practised safety strategies with the children in each house • Mum sought help for each of the children, drove them to all of their appointments, and stayed in touch with their support people • Mum prepared the children for their visits with Dad, and supported them emotionally after each one

Parenting decisions documented on the files of two KNR tamariki.



A tamariki creatively expressed her feelings about her Dad's violence

Hearing and elevating the voices of children in helping systems

The 10 tamariki were asked *"How much did your Kaiārahi Tamariki and Refuge help you?"*. Hunter (12) wanted everyone to know that he placed his sticker *"off the charts"*:

> *Wherever I put, it is off the page. There we go, just tell them I did that on purpose. Can you take me to Pluto real quick? Just to place this [sticker], I just need to place this on Pluto [laughs].*

As displayed throughout the previous findings sections, many activities with tamariki were fun, comforting, playful, and gratifying for tamariki clients. However, we found that kids, Mums, and KT all distinguished between 'just fun' and 'comfort and play for a purpose'. **While enjoyment and playfulness served as facilitators of a safety-focused intervention, KT maintained their equivalent focus on instrumentalising their time with tamariki to advance their voice, power, and access to systems of safety.**

Using their voices and stories powerfully began with how they invited and welcomed tamariki to speak and share, followed by how they recorded and framed their stories and experiences, and eventually by how they used those records and knowledge of children's perspectives on family violence to get them the best outcomes within adult systems less equipped with family violence expertise. Elevating their voices could take different forms; at times, KT were physically *with tamariki* in the room and supporting them to speak their own truth; at other times, they worked *with tamariki and then for tamariki* by putting their thoughts and experiences into a compelling case and arguing it (in person or in writing) within formal systems. However, both began with ensuring tamariki felt safe enough, comfortable enough, and certain enough of their KT to share that information with them.

Abbie (14), for instance, explained how her KT's approach to support differed from more generic and prescriptive service models, saying her KT *"built the bond"* while her previous counsellors had felt *"more like, cold, I guess...like didn't seem to actually care."* She felt that unlike those counsellors, she knew that her KT *"worked or organised a lot of things while I wasn't there to help me out later."* She believed Women's Refuge was the *"opposite of what normal counselling is for a lot of people"*, because *"it is a place where you can genuinely talk about your feelings"*.

Mums and KT explained how this approach was contingent on prioritising whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and rapport building with whānau first.

> ***I know [KNR] was more about talking to [my son] about his voice and his thoughts and feelings as a kid and his needs just completely separate to me and the whānau which was good, because it was like helping him and his identity. Like an advocate for the kids, you know.*** *– Mum*

> *I think lots of reasons why Refuge and this programme has worked for the kids, [is its] understanding of children as well, it's a big thing. – Mum*

> *So sometimes [KT] will ask them 'do you want to do it together or do you want it separate?'. When usually that wouldn't be an option, you know, and I think they were going together for ages. [My daughter] was really worried to begin with, she is like that with a lot of adults and stuff like that. But they have the option too, 'do you come with me on this day', you know, okay or 'we will go together' and it is just what works. No two kids are the same anyway, it is like with parenting, so, [KT] definitely meets them individually. – Mum*

One KT shared what drives her to use her social and epistemic power to advocate for the rights of tamariki, saying *"unlike tamariki, we get a choice, we have boundaries, we can assert ourselves"*. Another discusses the ethical imperative to use her specialist knowledge to take action for tamariki, saying:

> ***These kids trust us. So, you have to be confident to be there for them, it is a given. Like if you are literally getting this information you are privileged to even know that. So actually, if you are not going to use it in the right way what is the point.*** *– KT*

> *I think a win for them is knowing that they have an advocate for them, it is not attached to their Mum or their caregiver or their school or anything like that. I am solely for them, you know, I am going with what they say. – KT*

Tamariki and Mums talked about getting the most value from KT support in formal situations where they felt the least comfortable, and how this was enabled by the family violence expertise of the KT. One commented that she would not have been "*able to speak in court without her [KT] to support me.*"

> *I think [my daughter] could run things past [her KT] and be like 'is this a family violence thing or not?' and [her KT] knew the whole story so can take that into the context of everything else and be like 'yeah that is a violence thing or no that is not' and support her through that. – Mum*

> *[Her KT] has got the skills to do the trauma stuff, but [also] her personality, like she is just so good at her job, yeah she is so good at dealing with families, children, Mums, upset Mums. As a Mum you have got so many emotions like there has never been a time where I haven't been like I will ring [the KT] and be like 'this has happened' like she has got the violence knowledge. – Mum*

Hunter (12) and his Mum reflected on their experience of being supported by their KT to give evidence in court. For Mum, it helped to unburden her from the stress of an already exhausting situation, "*In the court process, [his KT] was right there with him. I could just try and focus what I needed to do next, and it was massive.*" For Hunter, the practice and preparation he did with his KT meant he felt sure of his truth and his experience of family violence, and he was

able to use his voice with adults, in an adult setting. Hunter proudly explained that he was able to stand his ground when being questioned by a defence lawyer about his story of victimisation.

> *[I said] 'No!', 'you aren't listening, stop trying to trick me'. – Hunter 12*

Abbie similarly reflected on the fear and mental weight that was reduced through advocacy:

> *Obviously [my KT] had done [police interviews] before so she was able to explain to me what would basically happen, which I guess made me feel a lot less nervous. Then she would always say like 'I know it is scary and intimidating' and stuff, but she would like, explain it to me and make it seem less scary. – Abbie 14*

Her Mum, in a separate interview, said much the same, and highlighted the constant advocacy on behalf of Abbie and her whānau, saying:

> *She has come with me when I've gone to court things or FGCs or OT, with psychiatrists, with doctors. [KT is] like 'I'll be there if the kids aren't getting a fair deal or they are not being heard', she will be there. – Mum*

Other Mums alluded to the value of the information that KT collect, and how high-quality information ends up being instrumental in how the voices of children are communicated elsewhere.

> *[KT] has managed to use everything we have told her without me having to go through a third person and that is something I could give to the courts to say I am a good parent. – Mum*

> *It was the cut off day for information for family court, she got a big report in for us, a questionnaire, [otherwise] all that [family violence] information would have been missed, all the disclosures from the children would have been missed. – Mum*

In a group discussion, KT were fervently united in their desire to best convey children's hopes, fears, worries, wants, needs, wishes, and (above all) voices to other services, especially those empowered to make decisions that would have monumental implications for their lives. They viewed the trust tamariki had placed in them by sharing their views and stories as a privilege and felt immense responsibility to do them justice by advocating for them in the most powerful way possible.

> *So, the [Lawyer for Child] can say something, but then the children say something different, and then I can also reiterate that in that same space with them and the child. So, I am articulating what the child is trying to say without them being able to say it, but just collectively I think, that is probably the most powerful that I've seen. – KT*

> ***[My client said] 'this is the first time anyone has ever listened to me' and I was like 'I can't promise to save the world or make all your wishes come true, but I will be sitting there telling everyone what you want'. She did end up getting her lasting wish which was to go back to her Mum and that is where she is. I am sure it has been a long like five years for her.** – KT*

Their frustration and disillusionment with services or systems that they experienced as obstructive to children's safety was at times palpable:

> *Others don't hear the actual voice and what children want. What [others] assume is right [comes] from [only] a snippet of information that they have got. – KT*

> *I found that if I attended the lawyer for child (LfC) appointment with the children their report is a lot more in favour of what the child actually said than what the [LfC] preconceived should happen...I often see like the report and I'm like 'that is not what we said'. So, [now the LfC] is held accountable, I suppose, and [there is] someone that is advocating for the child with the child in the room. – KT*

A frustrated Mum agreed, saying *"you can't see a child twice in 21 months and tell me that you know really a lot about them."* However, for KT, the heartache of encountering seemingly immovable roadblocks in their pursuit of safety for tamariki clients was also balanced by their relative successes, especially when the tamariki got their favoured outcomes.

> *[One of my clients] a little girl, I sat with her while a social worker and the Family Group Conference coordinator [separately] talked to her. So, she [hadn't had] that experience before, like when she had been asked about violence before she was at school, and she was just taken into a room with a stranger. This time she knew that [the meeting] was coming up, we prepped her and practiced already with a session together, and we actually [met with them] together and she realised 'this lady is not so bad'. And then the next week she changed her mind, and she knew she could tell me, and I would pass it on for her. Then she finally got the outcome she wanted from the FGC. – KT*

> *You could just see her relief when we got there and we met her out the front, it was just like this relief like 'finally there are [people who are] going to share the voice of my family'. – KT*

Other Mums named similar benefits; that when trying to advocate for the interests of their children, having someone whose sole focus is the child and who brings their knowledge of family violence to that advocacy holds immense power in formal settings.

> *[KT can] stand on behalf of the kids and say bits and pieces. It is nice to have that someone be so supportive as well. – Mum*

> *[KT] can tell our story and get everything across, where I could only tell portions of it because I'm trying to hold myself together, so I forget main things that actually would have been good for them to know. – Mum*

> *I would say to other people, 'get hold of [KT] at Women's Refuge, she knows'. Like the clinical psychologist for the courts, 'get hold of [KT], she knows our story.' I have been like 'oh [KT] do you mind if such and such rings you because [KT] knows [the whānau] and she can say like the effects that have happened to the children, and what kind of parent I've been. – Mum*

> *So, she will come to me to see where we are at and what way we need to go trying to work with me and my lawyer as well, making sure they are talking to the Lawyer for Child. – Mum*

As their quotes demonstrate, safety in KNR was catalysed in part by how Kaiārahi Tamariki understood what tamariki communicated to them, then overlaid it with their family violence analysis, and drew on both to represent children's voices and interests in situations in which these would otherwise go unheard.

6. What advocacy means for tamariki

In this section, we meet seven Kōkihi ngā Rito clients.

Manaia (8), Abbie (14), Hamiora (9), Ella (10), Viliamu (9), Atarina (7) and Whetu (8).

We explore their experiences of KNR in different ways to illustrate the family violence risk that they arrived with, the specific advocacy actions that made a difference to them, and the changes to the scope of safety that they finished KNR with.

The first case studies are those of Manaia (8) and Abbie (14), they reflect the multi-systems practice approach used in KNR. This is depicted using a visual model of 'risk' and 'safety' that situates family violence risks to tamariki across three levels: perpetrators' use of family violence, whānau and systems, and finally the state of risk or safety as it is manifest for the individual tamaiti. 'Risk' is represented in red, while 'safety' is represented in green.

Risk

Tamaiti

Risk to safety and wellbeing

Whānau & Systems

Unresponsive systems, unsupported whānau

Family Violence

Severity and reach of perpetrator's pattern of violence

Kōkihi ngā Rito

Safety

Tamaiti

Safety and wellbeing

Whānau & Systems

Whānau are supported by responsive and safe services and systems

Family Violence

Perpetrator's violence is disrupted

Case study – Manaia (8)

Manaia's (8) recollections of KNR and his Kaiārahi Tamariki (KT) showcase the value of the KNR three-pronged approach: centring the children, focusing on the family violence, and working with the child's whānau in culturally safe ways. The landscape of risk in Manaia's life and the scaffolding of safety that was established throughout his engagement with KNR is set out using the visual model of change.

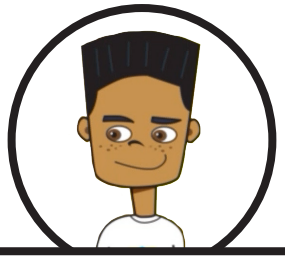
Risk for Manaia

Manaia was seven when he met his Kaiārahi Tamariki, and started working with her after his mother's partner (the perpetrator) violently attacked his mother and held her hostage. His Mum had PTSD from the attack and was briefly hospitalised, and the perpetrator continued to make contact and threaten them. Manaia was acutely aware of the impacts this violence had on his Mum and life at his home, saying she would come home when she "**got fixed**" and that it had been a "**nightmare**" with the perpetrator around.

Safety for Manaia

Manaia met his Kaiārahi Tamariki (KT) at Refuge and worked with her for a few months, left for a while, and then decided to work with her some more. He says it let he and his Mum "**Have some time alone, and then have some time being two [of us]**". He liked that there was someone outside his household who always had "**a chat with me about how I am and how I feel,**" as well as helping them so the perpetrator couldn't "**yell at us anymore.**" The feelings they talked about were "**big feelings!**" but his KT was "**always smiling**" and was also focused on "**making us feel great and happy.**"

Risk for Manaia



Manaia

Safety for Manaia

KEY

- Critical Risk
- Some Risk
- Safety

Risk for Manaia

Tamaiti

Afraid for his life, feels like things will never get better

Whānau & Systems

Police did not take a statement for physical or sexual abuse

Mum is his safe parent but was violently injured

Courts closed during Covid, could not file Protection Order

Family Violence

Made multiple threats to kill Manaia

Made Manaia terrified of his violence

Made Manaia terrified that his Mum would die die

Made Manaia feel responsible for the family's safety

Used fear, intimidation, threats, and physical violence regularly

Safety for Manaia

Tamaiti

Built confidence in himself, his Mum, and his whānau

Whānau & Systems

Manaia feels listened to & works on what safety means to him

Mum is supported emotionally and with parenting

Manaia & Mum strengthen their relationship

Family Violence

Perpetrator faces justice outcomes for historic offending

Protection order is granted

Perpetrator uses others to intimidate Mum

Perpetrator continues abuse of Mum digitally

The whānau move to be closer to support networks

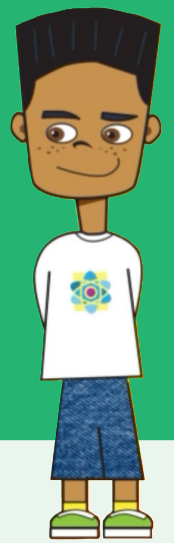
Kōkihi Ngā Rito built safety by:

- Building a **safe and trusting relationship** with Manaia and helping him **take the lead** on identifying his **strengths**, his **whānau identity**, his **hopes and dreams**, and **his goals** for himself and his whānau
- Building up his **self-confidence** and **self-esteem** using **praise** and **positive reinforcement**
- Supporting him to **express and make sense** of his experiences of **violence and the perpetrator**, to learn what **safety means to him**
- Creating **realistic safety plans** that Manaia understood and felt comfortable and confident in, and **practising and updating** these as needed
- Enabling Manaia and his Mum to **spend time apart** and have time **away from the violence** and its impacts, allowing Mum time to heal, and giving her a **counter-narrative to her self-blame** to promote her parenting capacity
- Supporting Manaia's Mum to navigate and pursue available **justice options**

Manaia's Reflections:

Manaia made the following points about his journey through KNR, from his very first day, to the big outcome he was hoping for:

- *"The first day when I met [my KT] and what we done was asking what my friends name was and how I feel, and we had something to eat, and she wanted to see what my favourite food was."*
- *"I feel a bit happy that she has been talking to me and then she just drops me off really good and she been really patient."*
- *"There was one thing that was really cool that was playing with playdough, and you build something like my waka and then you take it home and it is dry, and you can put it anywhere."*
- *"She picks a lot of things we could do for me when I'm not there".*
- *"She never gave up; she never gives up on us."*
- *"And also, so we saw that [the perpetrator] can't yell at us anymore".*



Case study – Abbie (14)

Abbie is extraordinary. Abbie met with us after work; she had recently gotten her first job. She is 14 now, and started in KNR at age 12, almost 18 months ago.

Risk for Abbie

Abbie was 12 when she started working with her Kaiārahi Tamariki. She was referred because her Dad's abuse toward her Mum, herself, and her siblings escalated and her Dad was arrested.

She felt like things would never change, saying "**We had to move towns, move schools, and he has done nothing to change or get help and he still won't leave us in peace**."

Safety for Abbie

Abbie stayed in Kōkihi ngā Rito for over a year, and she says it was the only service where she could "**talk for as long as I needed to**", and that her Kaiārahi Tamariki was the only one who "**got to know me**", explained things "**in a way I could understand**" and "**made it seem less scary**", and who was "**genuinely caring about my feelings**".

She reflected "**I did have to work hard to get to where I am now**" and that it felt great to have someone who "**celebrates every little thing**" she achieved and "**would say how like proud she was of me.**"

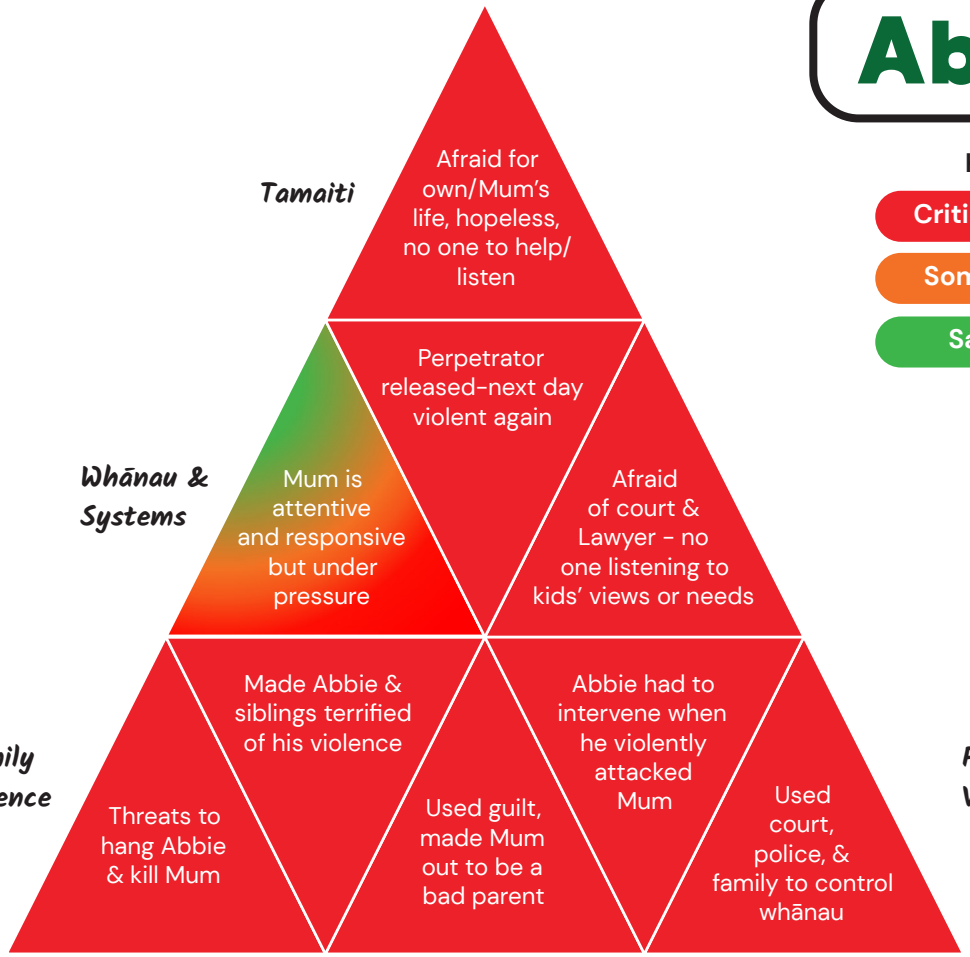
Risk for Abbie

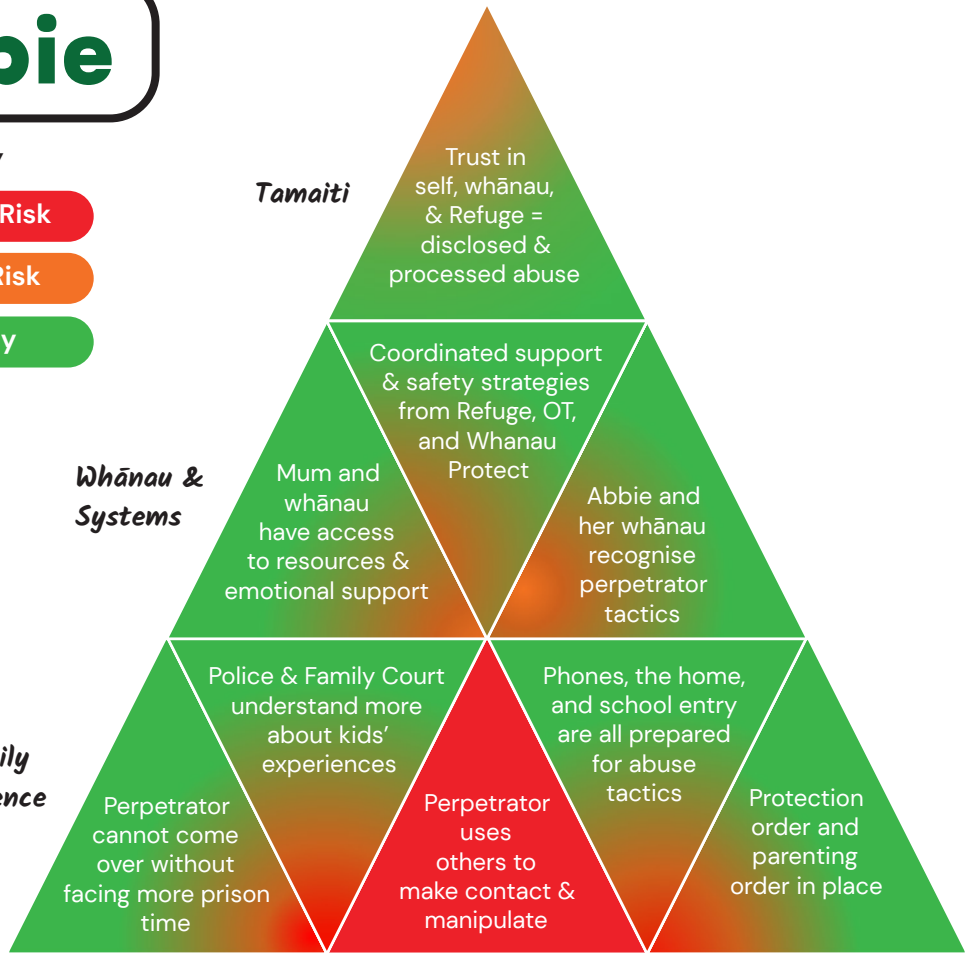
Abbie

Safety for Abbie

KEY

- Critical Risk
- Some Risk
- Safety

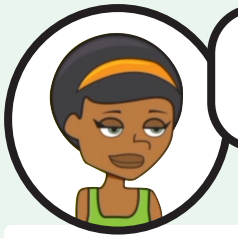




Kōkihi Ngā Rito built safety by:

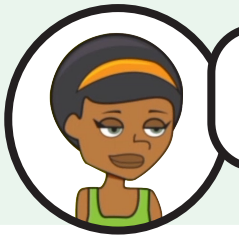
- Working **just for Abbie** & doing what **works best for her**, so she feels **in control** again
- Managing **risks like self-harm** & creating **safety plans** with her **whānau & support agencies**
- Building **emotion-regulation skills** and finding creative & visual ways to **process feelings** like anger, fear, worry, grief, shame, & hopelessness
- Helping Abbie over several weeks to **identify her thoughts & preferences** about safety & seeing the perpetrator, and writing it up
- Setting up meetings with the Lawyer for Child, Oranga Tamariki, & school so Abbie can have **input in decisions about her safety**
- Supporting Mum, validating **parenting strengths**, & helping with **whānau issues** to **wrap support** around Abbie
- Creating **joint safety/risk management** plans with police & other agencies to **safeguard tamariki**

Abbie



Building safety WITH Abbie

- Giving long-term, predictable, and consistent one-on-one support
- Getting the full picture of risks across all areas of her life
- Discussing online safety, privacy, and consent
- Zoom sessions and coping plans during Covid isolation
- Working on comfort zones and exploring how to step slightly out of them
- Organising access to sports activities
- Demystifying and preparing for the police and court processes
- Dropping off Christmas food parcels and gifts
- Celebrating her successes
- Working on her relationship with food and her body
- Taking her to pick out clothes and toiletries from the donation shop
- Identifying triggers related to her Dad's abuse and planning how to manage them

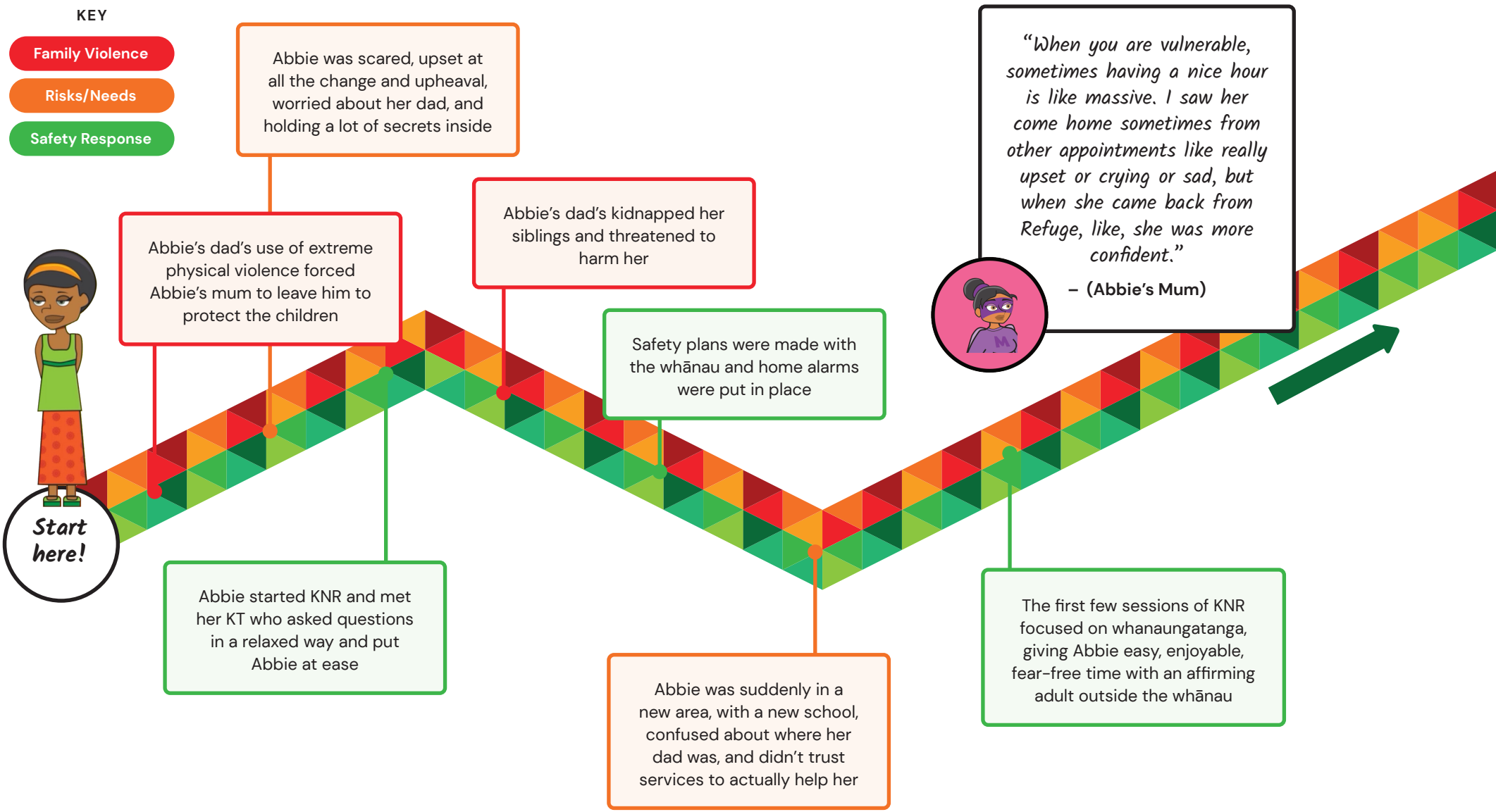


Building safety FOR Abbie

- Finding respite options for her to have a break from high-needs siblings
- Helping her Mum find a lawyer specialising in family violence
- Finding out who the lawyer for child is and meeting with them first
- Talking to police about the arrest timeline
- Finding information about legal aid for her Mum
- Advocating for the family's needs with the medical team at the hospital
- Writing down the experiences/opinions the client wants to pass on to her lawyer for child
- Suicide prevention planning and nightly check-ins during periods of distress
- Recording disclosures of abuse and self-harm and connecting with other services
- Regular check-ins with her Mum to support her parenting capacity
- Finding and applying for mental health services on her behalf
- Helping her Mum with protection order/parenting order applications
- Going to family meetings with OT to request specific supports for them
- Talking to police and making a Report of Concern with her Mum's approval

Abbie's advocacy road-map:

Abbie's advocacy road-map:



KEY

- Family Violence
- Risks/Needs
- Safety Response

Start here!

Over time, Abbie disclosed other types of abuse that she had been subjected to

Abbie's dad applied to the court for shared care of Abbie and her siblings, blaming the children's distress and behavioural issues on their mother. Despite Abbie not wanting this, the family court process was started

Abbie's fear, anger and worry got worse. She began having outbursts at home. She felt she had no say over whether she would end up away from her safe mum and with her violent dad. She disclosed suicidal thinking to her KT

These disclosures were all recorded, using Abbie's quotes. Her KT talked to her about who she wanted involved and they agreed on how to bring in Police and her Mum

Abbie and her KT agreed that they would talk to her Mum to form an action plan for coping with distress at home, including being able to contact her KT anytime she felt overwhelmed

"Counsellors ask like so many questions, but [my KT] just listens and understands."

– (Abbie)

Abbie was self-harming, having difficulty eating, and showing signs of PTSD. She needed to talk about it in a safe place with a safe person, and needed to know she could trust her KT to make decisions with her, rather than for her

Her KT regularly acknowledged her bravery, challenged her self-blame, validated her experiences, and put her in control of what they talked about and when

Her KT referred her to mental health support, and used sensory and mindfulness techniques to help manage her distress

KEY

- Family Violence
- Risks/Needs
- Safety Response

Her KT worked with her to convey her experiences and worries about spending time with her dad to the Lawyer for Child, and wrote up a report for the court outlining her dad's history of family violence and the impacts to Abbie, her siblings, and their safe parent

[Abbie's dad] said to the court that now that I'm sole parent, we are engaging all these services for mental health. So he is saying that's because of me... So, I guess that was really hard to hear as a mum. And how do you prove that? Because he is denying that anything happened... Now [KT] has managed to use everything we have told her without me having to go through it all to a third person and that is something I could give to the courts."

– (Abbie's Mum)

The police recorded that Abbie and her siblings were very shaken up and scared by the ongoing violence and their Dad's anger and disregard for their safety

Mum called their KT, who then spent a lot of time with Abbie as/when she needed while also following up the breach of protection order with the police

Start here!

"I know a lot of time I know she was in contact with the lawyer for child... and would be like "I'm trying to speed that along for you.""..."[My KT's] goal was I think to make me feel heard."

– (Abbie)

Abbie's dad breached the protection order as soon as he was released, and found out where the family was living - he was arrested

The costs involved with moving and staying safe, put Abbie's Mum at a financial disadvantage, leaving less family income available to dedicate to Abbie and her siblings and creating stress for the whānau

KEY

- Family Violence
- Risks/Needs
- Safety Response

Start here!

Over time Abbie disclosed more of the abuse, she felt both safe to do this and additional grief about her dad's actions

Over several months, Abbie and her KT worked on building up her confidence, ensuring she led the purpose and goals of their work together, reflecting her successes and strengths, and going through therapeutic exercises to introduce new coping, regulation, communication, and social skills to help with big feelings

"I think [without Kōkihi ngā Rito] she would be stuck in the whole how she was at the start, like, just in her shell, feeling no self-worth. With domestic violence, it is hard to explain what it does to you as a person. [And] before Refuge, they had to see their dad, because he is their dad you can't stop that."

– (Abbie's Mum)

Abbie's KT applied for funding to cover some of the outstanding expenses (e.g., locks, children's hobbies) and help Mum to treat the children and spend time having fun/regrouping as a family

Abbie continued to work with her KT until she decided she had achieved everything she wanted to, and the closure process was led by her and celebrated her resilience and growth during her time at Refuge

Abbie Closes:

"So when we closed she let me choose what to do to celebrate and made it like a family thing, a lot of people, like I enjoyed it."

– (Abbie)

Case study – Hamiora (9), Ella (10), and Viliamu (9)

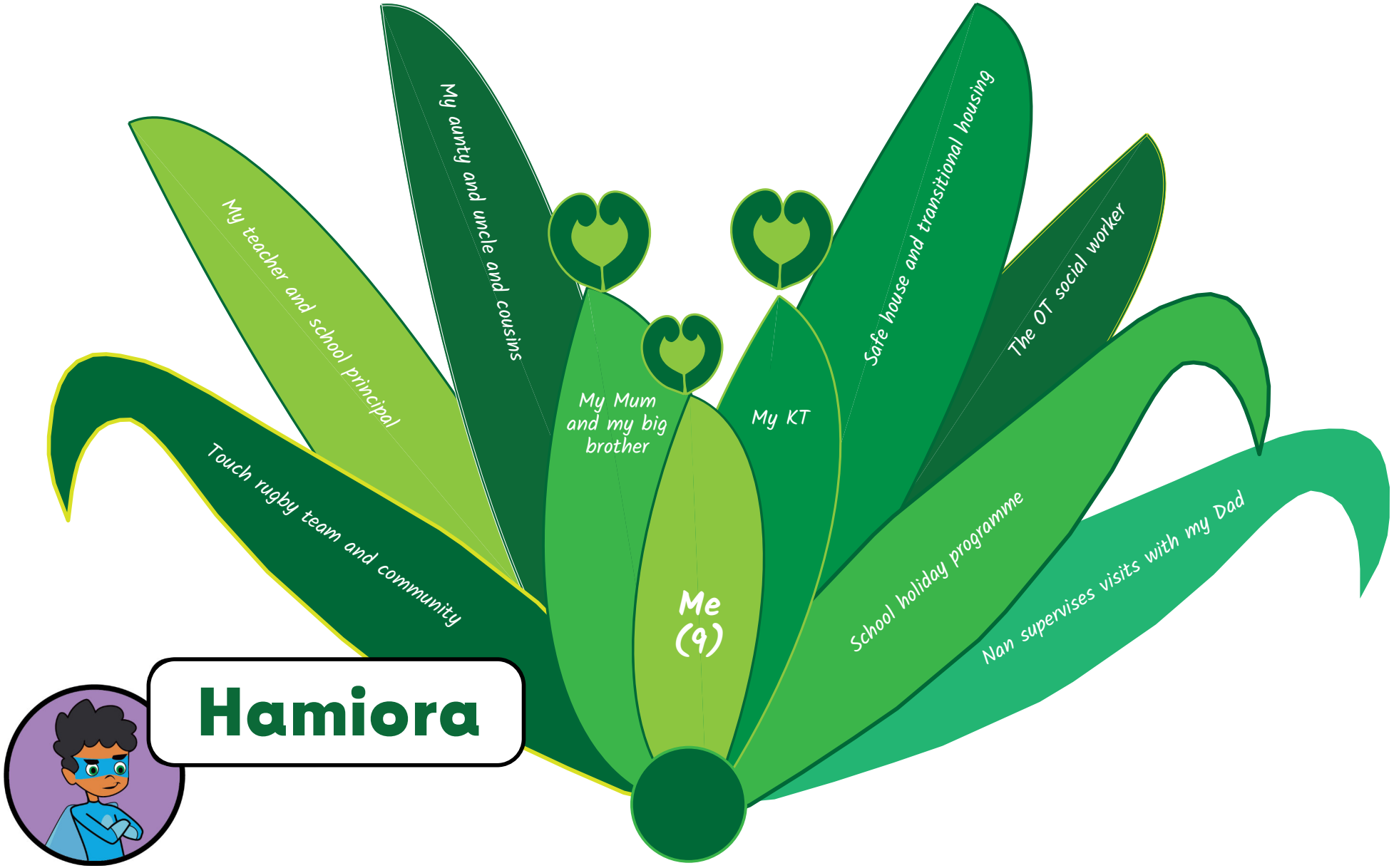
These case studies are based solely on Recordbase files relating to three selected tamariki: Hamiora (9, Māori), Ella (10, Pākehā), and Viliamu (9, Samoan). The journeys of these tamariki showcase the differences in how support was tailored and targeted for each child. The harakeke is visually depicted here for each tamaiti.

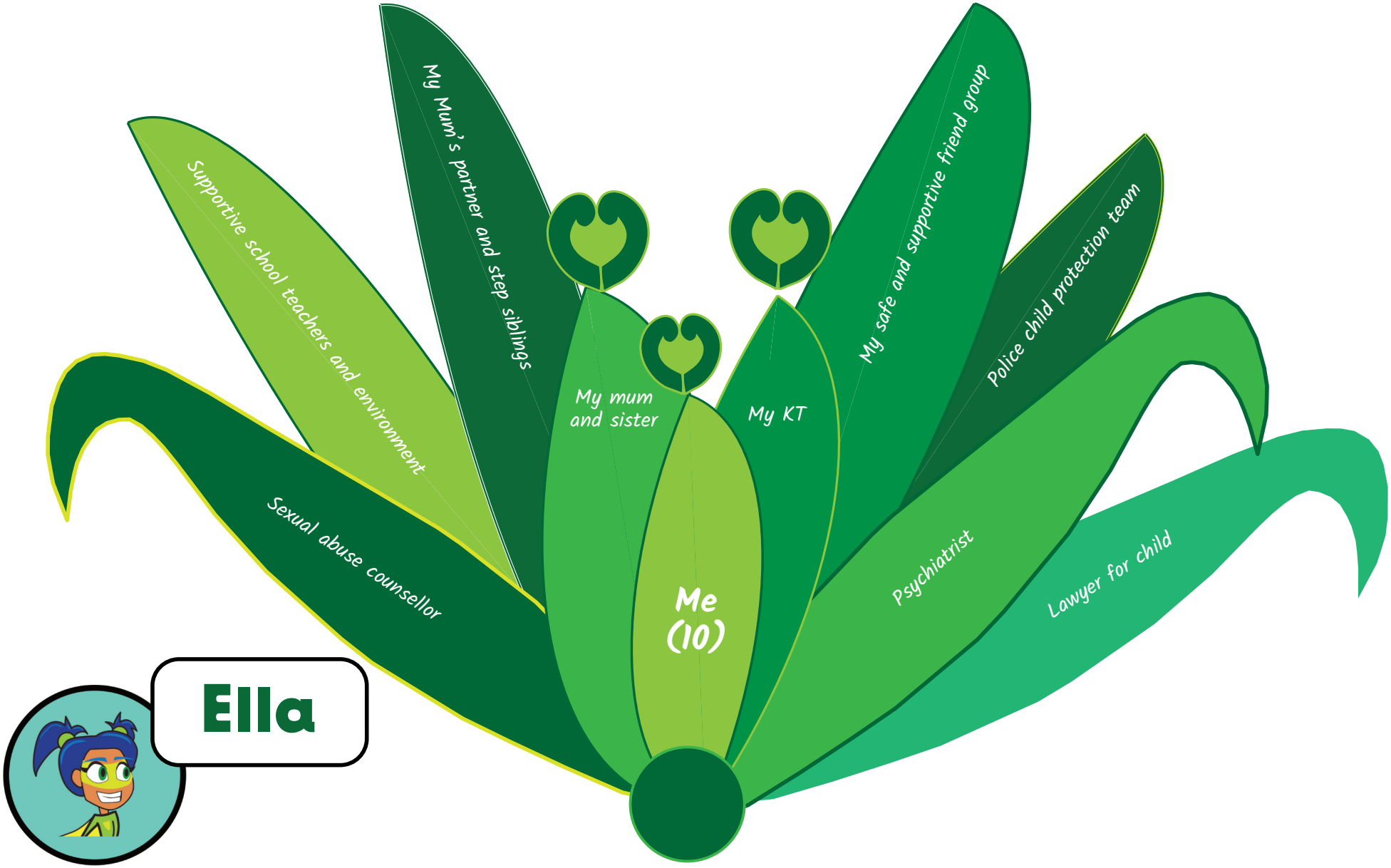
Each child is an individual. They have different safe people, different whānau systems, different relationships to and contact with perpetrators, different interests, different living situations, and different abilities. They are at different stages in their journeys through violence, so they have different risks, and, of course, different needs. However, they all require and deserve safety that feels mana-enhancing, and they all require and deserve the right people – *their* right people – to be involved for them. In the images below, we can see Hamiora, Ella, and Viliamu, standing as tall as they can, centred as the rito in the heart of the harakeke. For each of these tamariki their Mum is right next to them, fulfilling their core needs for safe, protective care.

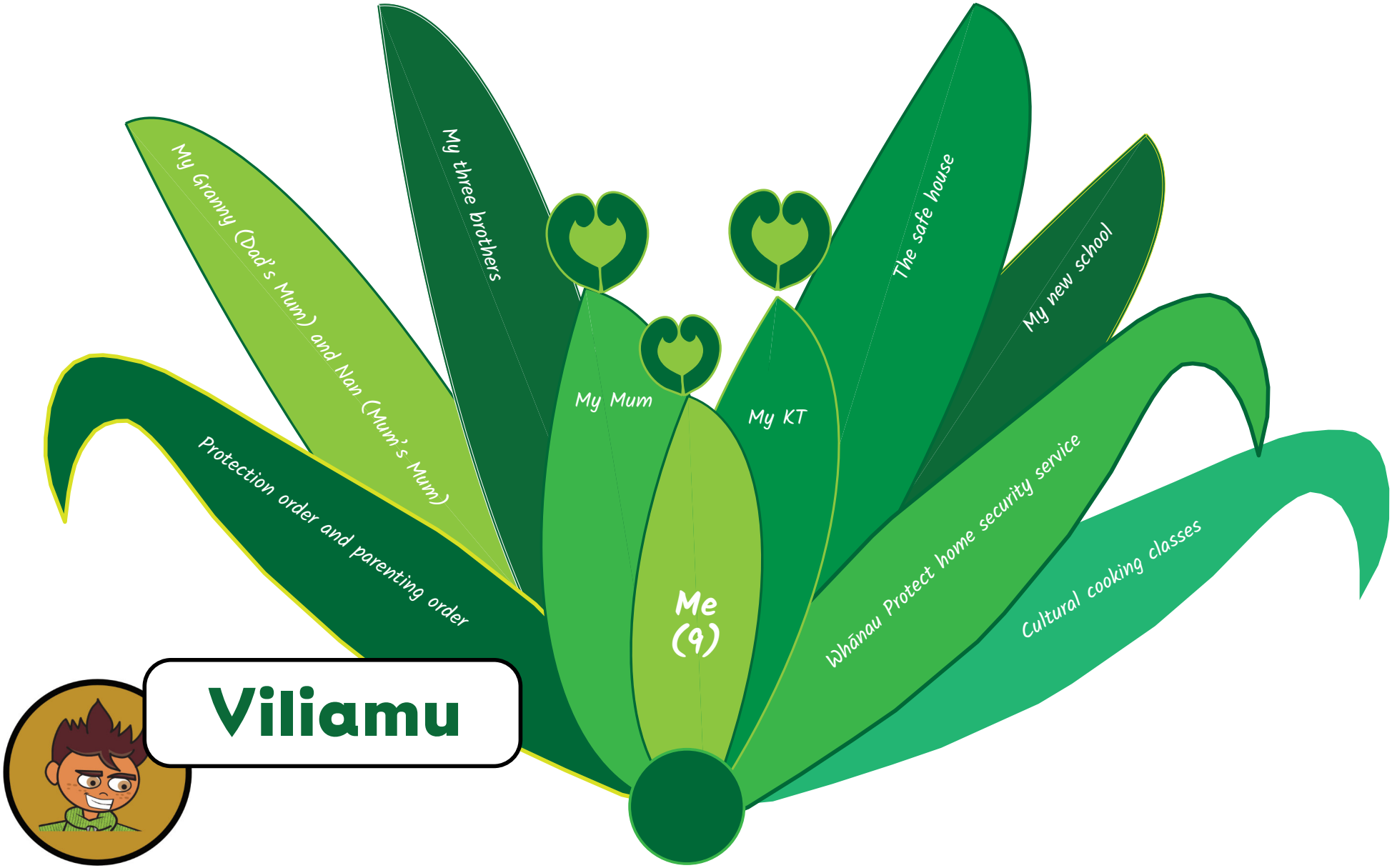
The harakeke identifies their most proximal and crucial whānau and system support structures and how they operate in tandem to nurture and protect them – specifically in relation to safety from family violence. As one KNR Manager describes, *"it has to include whānau because the kids can't thrive if the parents aren't thriving and every other part of the whānau isn't thriving.*

> *Te Rito, that middle bit of harakeke bush which always represents a child in Te Ao Māori and the flax around [represents the] adults...the generations just unfold, but that little bit is never touched in the harakeke it is never picked. It is always the outsides hence the reason Māori use it as a metaphor for protecting our babies. So that is what makes us unique the way we deliver, the way we metaphor the names for using our tamariki as opposed to child advocates and we are more than child advocates. We guide them in everything they want, and they feel they need. So, I think it is a real special kaupapa and it is really, really neat and there has been a gap for years. – Kaiārahi Tamariki Māori*

Each blade in a child's harakeke is there for one of two reasons: either they are identified by the tamaiti as central to their identity, safety, and wellbeing, or they are someone or something that fulfils crucial safety functions in the aftermath of family violence for that tamaiti.


My aunty and uncle and cousins
My teacher and school principal
Touch rugby team and community
My Mum and my big brother
Me (9)
My KT
Safe house and transitional housing
The OT social worker
School holiday programme
Nan supervises visits with my Dad
Hamiora


Ella
Me (10)
My mum and sister
My KT
My Mum's partner and step siblings
Supportive school teachers and environment
Sexual abuse counsellor
My safe and supportive friend group
Police child protection team
Psychiatrist
Lawyer for child


My Granny (Dad's Mum) and Nan (Mum's Mum)
My three brothers
My Mum
My KT
The safe house
My new school
Protection order and parenting order
Me
(9)
Whānau Protect home security service
Cultural cooking classes
Viliamu

Case study – Atarina (7) tamariki priorities in action

Direct advocacy case study:

A KT in one of the tangata whenua refuges describes a memorable moment where she supports Atarina, aged 7, with her interactions at school.

This brief case study highlights how her KT was able to uphold the purpose and vision of Kōkihi ngā Rito, and use her advocacy to address Atarina's needs that stem from family violence.

- Kids experiences feel big; they feel overwhelmed, scared, and confused;
- When talking to adults, or being in adult services, kids do not feel heard;
- Other services do not fully understand their family violence contexts;
- Kids often they leave without having their questions answered; and
- Kids often leave without getting the outcomes that they desperately want.

Tamariki priorities in action!

Problem when attributed to child:

Atarina is refusing to communicate at school.

Problem when attributed to family violence:

Family violence in Atarina's life resulted in barriers to her confidence in communicating at school.

Kōkihi ngā Rito advocacy goal:

Develop a relationship with Atarina by demonstrating consistency and care, so she feels safe enough to use her voice.

Atarina's KT Reflections:

"I have one client who wouldn't talk to anybody, she was effectively mute, and was was being cognitively tested within the schooling system.

When I dropped her off at school - it sounds like nothing, but I put my hand out for all the kids to hold if they want to, I don't make them hold it, and the other day I turned around after I closed the van door and she had her hand out ready for me and I was like we are there, we have got that. But you know, it seems so trivial to notice that kind of small action in her, but it is so demonstrative of how that relationship is important and how the repetition is important, she knew we would be holding hands going in so, she was ready for me to do that.

If she has had a bad day at school and I pick her up and she is a bit tentative, I'll go 'are you going to bring your voice today?' Because you know how tedious I am! It's amazing being her ear. She will just start talking because I don't think anybody said to her 'your voice is valued'. They just go 'why aren't you talking?', 'answer me!'.

So, I can take her into school and I can show the staff there that she will speak because we kōrero openly, and go 'look she will talk if you take the time, if you show her respect' because they have pigeonholed her as this painful family violence kid that is just causing trouble and who won't communicate. But she will communicate. So, they can see that she will now. So just because we have got that bond she will run around and she will talk to teachers now, she will use her voice with others.

They are not continuing with any cognitive testing for anything anymore. I'm glad they know now that she was not the problem here, they were the problem."

Case study – Whetu (8) whānau advocacy and values in action:

Whānau advocacy case study:

A KT in one of the tangata whenua refuges describes a "*winning moment*" where she supports Whetu, aged 8, and his whānau. This brief case study highlights how his KT was able to uphold the purpose and values of Kōkihi ngā Rito to support Whetu as he experienced the impacts of family violence.

- **Te Tapu o te tamaiti** – Acknowledging and understanding the sacredness of a tamaiti and using this to ensure the safety of the tamaiti is paramount
- **Whanaungatanga** – Relationships for tamariki are encouraged for growth and development
- **Whakapapa** – Tamariki are encouraged to explore all aspects of who they are, growing their sense of identity and belonging
- **Koha mai, koha atu** – Allowing for the tamaiti to share and receive in a way that is best for them
- **Te mana o te tamaiti** – Acknowledging that each tamaiti possesses strengths in their own ways

KNR values in action!

Problem when attributed to child:

Whetu is misbehaving at school.

Problem when attributed to family violence:

Family violence in Whetu's life and his removal from Mum's care impacted his education.

Kōkihi ngā Rito advocacy goal:

To ensure that Whetu's wants and needs are heard and his whānau have the resources and support to care for him.

Whetu's KT Reflections:

"Whetu's teacher is texting me right now actually! I've been working with this whānau, the kids had been removed by OT to their Nan's and working with the whole whānau was pretty intense.

I could just see Whetu's whole attitude, he was just misbehaving big time at school like hitting kids with sticks, running away from the teacher, jumping on the roofs, having a lot of issues. The teachers didn't know what to do, so they put him onto me, to Kōkihi.

I worked with the whole whānau, I actually got the mum and the dad into our intergenerational trauma healing programme and got them onto our advocate. Right now his mum, I have got her onto the Wāhine programme as well and the dad is doing the Tane programme, and I've been working with Whetu one on one.

That repetition seeing Whetu all the time, every week, made a big impact on him because then I got the text last week from the mum to say that they were allowed their tamariki back home. Whetu has just changed, his whole aroha has changed, he said 'you listened to me aye? that is why I got to go home!', and I actually didn't do it by myself, I worked with OT as well because the whānau had to go through a lot of FGCs. I took Whetu's voice to the FGCs and I told them what he wanted.

When I went to see him again, because he asked if he could interview me for his school project, so, I said, 'how are things going at home?' and he said 'it's going good whaea, because you know what my dad he is doing programmes now so it has been really good at home'.

So, I said 'cool, you know you can ring me anytime' and now I keep getting phone calls saying, 'when are you coming back whaea?' I laugh and say 'I told you I'm going away for training this week!'. So, I'll have got to ring him tonight so he will know that I will be back next week.

We have built that cool relationship. So that was a big win. It was cool, and seeing that change in his whole ahoi too, his attitude is just amazing, and the teachers have noticed it too. They are saying he is doing really well at school now."

As explained above, the three blades at the heart of the harakeke are crucial to the life of the harakeke, and its thriving future. In Kōkihi Ngā Rito, these three blades represent the tamaiti, their safe caregivers, and Kaiārahi Tamariki (representing the family violence expertise that safeguards tamariki). The three blades are interdependent; if one blade is missing, safety in its entirety is unattainable – the potential of KNR would remain unfulfilled. Tamariki stories in this chapter reflect the merging of the child-led, family violence-informed, whānau approach to KNR.

7. Barriers to maximum safety for tamariki

Service-specific limitations of support

While the previous findings sections have focused on what did and did not work well for tamariki and how they regarded change as being catalysed through Kōkihi ngā Rito (KNR), this section focuses on one of the most important questions we asked tamariki: 'what could make Kōkihi ngā Rito even better for kids?'.

The foremost improvement tamariki desired for Kōkihi ngā Rito was, quite simply, "more." They wanted more of what worked for them, and they wanted KNR to work for more tamariki. Manaia (8) laughed as he explained what would make KNR a better service for him, "*Staying with [Kaiārahi Tamariki (KT)] for the whole day, but Mum would be like 'when is Manaia going to be back?' and she will be like 'man! Manaia has bloody bedtime!'*". Clara (7) similarly wanted *"five times more [KT name]"* so that she could see her *"even more times"*.

Corey (9) looked at us seriously and made sure we knew that he *"really liked"* his KT before making his suggested improvements, *"more things for stressed kids, a little stressed-out corner, with stress toys, and fidget spinners"*. Ace (6) and Manu (8) once again riffed off one another, and their creative ideas flowed. They named *"a swimming pool at the safe house"*, *"cause it's too hot"*, *"with a waterslide"*, *"and lolly machines"*. Sam (11) quipped that Refuge needed *"a McDonalds, and a private chef"*, he joked that it would not cost too much, just *"a couple of million bucks"*.

Alongside their fun (if at times unrealistic) ideas, tamariki listed tangible resources that would make life easier for their whānau, such as *"getting a car"*, *and "getting a house"*. The material essentials they identified illustrated what still represented gaps in the perceived ease and viability of their future lives. In addition, they wanted permanence and belonging within the context of their support.

They mentioned:

> *Coming back [to KNR] whenever I want. – Taika, 7*
>
> *A home that is gunna stay safe. – Sam, 11*
>
> *I want to keep seeing [KT] for more and more years. – Hana, 5*

Abbie (14) had completed a group programme with Refuge prior to receiving one on one support through KNR. In Abbie's group, there were six other young people who she found herself worrying about after the group programme finished. Her ideas for improvement centred on each of those six having access to KNR as clients and deriving the same quality, effectiveness, and opportunity of support that she had.

> *I guess just like, I'm not sure what happened to the other kids I was doing group with, I feel like the one-on-one stuff with [KT] really helped me. Just like make sure that the [other] kids in it got the help they needed afterwards because I feel like it is a lot different one on one than in a whole group setting. - Abbie*

She added that if this was not possible due to KT being *"just so busy with us"*, the possibility of extended support through KNR could at least be demystified and presented to them so, if their need increased, they had a safety net. She suggested that *"maybe just like them have the option if they wanted to talk about it or even to know in the future they can always come back and get involved in it again"*.

The 'more' that tamariki expressed they wanted (in part for themselves, but more commonly for others that they perceived needed support) has questionable viability within the current resourcing and capacity of the pilot. As Kaiārahi Tamariki and managers at pilot Refuges reflected, KNR is a time- and resource-intensive initiative. They commented on the benefits: a service gap filled for children aged 5-12 years old, a better approach to managing risk, and, at the end, tamariki who were demonstrably safer. Equally, while their discussions of the process of implementation was wholly positive in their appraisal of outcomes, they also commented on the Refuge investment required to establish it well, safely, and effectively. Establishing the infrastructure for it to fulfil its potential for tamariki, they reflected, took time and openness to learning. They felt that achieving outcomes, proving efficacy, and understanding trends for tamariki were challenging tasks to fulfil in a relatively short timeframe.

> *I think it is too early days to have those miracle outcomes that sometimes the funders expect, you know, like we know when we work in this space sometimes if we have been trying to reach a wāhine that we have been trying to chase for five or ten years and she finally answers our phone call we are like yay. That is a huge success. – Manager*

> ***In terms of this pilot time frame [being evaluated after 18 months] it's not long enough for us to really break any cycles because of the long-term habits and how the family violence and dynamics always has been and things like that. I guess the success for us is that we are trying our best and we are making an effort and challenging some of those Pacific Island norms. It is a huge job, not easy, but if we build the right relationship with the right people and making sure that we don't disrespect any spaces, we hope that in the long run that this will be effective.*** – Manager

The main challenges voiced by Kaiārahi Tamariki related to the sustained intensity of the KNR workload associated with supporting children within and in relation to their environments.

> *I feel there is a need [for KT] to be [responsive to clients] 24/7, that is probably one of my best examples of why a caseload can't be too high. The time that you have to engage, follow up, attend meetings or appointments, get the violence information [to the right people], and check in, is like unbelievable, but worth it, but it is time consuming. But good to have that time, because if [a client] was only [allowed to remain in service] for 2 months, we wouldn't get the same outcomes because the system doesn't work in a time frame. - KT*

KT also talked about the challenges of implementing an entirely new practice approach separately to the rest of their colleagues at their Refuges, and how the role of 'Kaiārahi Tamariki' differed to any other in their Refuge or even their regional area.

> *It's a different way of working and it takes time to realise why writing notes is important, and just how everything you do is advocacy, its more involved than other roles I've had, there is more flexibility, but the more you know you can do the more you do, and it keeps on going. – KT*

> *In the perfect world, you would have like 6 months to just establish yourself, like meet all the key players in your community, and know where you can take the role, and the family violence part. – KT*

> *I think to myself 'at the end of the day there is just me, where will I find the space' [to see more clients intensively]. – KT*

Similarly, managers spoke about the challenges involved in launching a pilot predicated on the use of advocates with both familiar and distinct skill-sets.

> *Getting the right person is hard, they need to have that violence understanding, and we can strengthen that, but they need to work with kids, like they need to just get kids, and not everyone can, and not everyone cares. – Manager*

> *KNR only worked so well because of [KT], I know it wasn't that smooth sailing for everyone. – Manager*

Kaiārahi Tamariki felt strongly that a whole-of-Refuge approach to KNR and the KT role enhanced the advocacy provided to tamariki; specifically, through a child-centred approach that equalled advocacy with wāhine clients in intensity and specificity. However, there was variability in how Refuges adapted to the unique role of KT.

> *My manager was on board from day one and that made it so much easier. – KT*

> *There was, what can I say, it took time to find where I fitted in with the other staff. – KT*

> *The impact of the childs' voice in this [Refuge] space has left staff saddened that children's perspectives and wishes were given little consideration prior to this role being established. – KT*

> *I think it is difficult sometimes to, you know, get used to having kids open for like over a year, it doesn't always look tidy, but KNR is different, it is ongoing. It can look to others like I'm not doing everything I can to finish with a whānau. – KT*

> *We work closely, we think about children together, like the safe house staff, the women's advocates, the whole of Refuge works together for the kids. – Refuge Kaimahi*

Other barriers KT noticed involved the *"missed opportunities"* with tamariki whose circumstances meant they left the safe house after only a week, and their wish to connect with and equivalently support tamariki who did not get to experience the full benefits of KNR (14 of the 126 KNR tamariki engaged in KNR for under one month). Finally, KT discussed the variability in their communities and how this shaped the prioritisation of tamariki clients and the functions of advocacy for their clients; for some refuges, clients were comprised principally of whānau who stayed in the safe house, for others the biggest need was found to be within community-based whānau. Some KT adjusted their initial KNR implementation plan to better suit the needs of their communities. They spoke about taking time to work through the *"settling in period"* of the iteratively developed and wholly new pilot.

Barriers to safety in systems

Tamariki were only as safe as helping and legal systems allowed them to be. Kaiārahi Tamariki and managers reported that participation in the pilot advanced their understanding of children's experiences, the risks family violence poses to children, and the corresponding safety needs that are linked to perpetrators' use of violence in kids' lives. They identified the flow-on effects to other Refuge mahi, such as including children in their kōrero when advocating on behalf of adult clients who are mothers, or when advocating with external agencies.

> *I think what has probably changed for me is when I am talking about family violence I go in more depth about the effects of violence on children. Now it is like this has brought the children more to the forefront for me. – Manager*

Kaiārahi Tamariki collectively agreed that KNR works most effectively for tamariki when the people, services, and systems that interact with them work together with the interests and rights of the children at the forefront of their decision making and action. They readily named examples of this happening, and the positive outcomes that system responsiveness enabled for tamariki. However, the facilitation of children's safety by key decision-makers in the systems around them was not always consistent or safety-generating.

At times KT capacity could be deployed toward bridging these gaps; building successful relationships with agencies and system actors supported a collaborative approach to tamariki safety. At other times, KT described outcomes for tamariki that did not fulfil their aspirations for their safety. They highlighted instances where decision-makers did not consider children's wishes, did not link perpetrators' behaviour to the very real and ongoing risks to tamariki, did not use or fully comprehend the significance of family violence information, and did not regard children's experiences of family violence as severe, harmful, or threatening.

Examples of these foreseeable risk situations include:

- Decision-makers and supporting actors not having a specialist understanding of family violence
- Specialist information not being respected and considered
- Forcing tamariki to see perpetrators when they have stated (often multiple times) that do not feel safe to see them
- A lack of transparency creating uncertainty for tamariki in how often, and how long, they have to see perpetrator/Dad for
- Children's wishes not being fulfilled leading to them negatively experiencing services, systems, and individuals within these
- Difficulty accessing lawyers who consistently apply their knowledge of client's experiences of violence
- Lawyers not having the time or resources to get to know the children and accurately interpret what they want
- Lawyers not relaying the wishes of children in court
- Judges making decisions based on an incident of violence and not the history of violent offending that impacts tamariki
- Care and protection proceedings not making decisions that are inclusive of children's disclosures of physical and sexual violence
- Misinterpreting, or simplifying the complexity of children's relationships with their offending Dads/perpetrators
- Misunderstanding the ongoing impacts of harm to tamariki, caused by perpetrators
- Punitive responses to Mums by helping organisations
- Focusing on Mums' skills-building and their accountability to others, rather than building their resources and capacity
- Parenting strengths are rarely recorded or talked about (e.g., judges' decisions do not mention Mums' efforts in violent environments and in response to the violence)
- The use of language that mutualises who is responsible for putting tamariki in danger
- Assumptions of equal parenting efforts prior to recorded instances of family violence
- Long wait times in court – precluding certainty, stability, and healing

KT also recalled instances where they were not perceived to be specialists with specialist input, precluding their unique positioning as the advocate for tamariki to be potentiated for safer decision-making.

> *So now we are not calling ourselves advocates, we are calling ourselves 'family violence specialists', [but that's] only in certain settings, which I don't like using [that title], but I only use it for care and protection things, in schools, at FGCs, otherwise they just don't take me seriously...I'm used to getting pushback from services, but I shouldn't have to prove myself, validate my story to even be valued. [I say to them] 'do you not hear me? like I am literally telling you about this violence, this kid, this whānau and you are undermining me'. – KT*

KT, tamariki, and Mums spoke about the enormity of the issue this caused for the continuity of children's safety and their trust in helping systems. A KT summarises how children are impacted when family violence information is differentially understood, applied, and actioned. When asked whether anything was preventing KNR being as effective as it could be, she explained:

> *Our relationships with the people who have power to do anything, that is the biggest issue because we can't do anything more in certain places if we are met with 'no' all the time or they are not going to care as much or they aren't [considering] that family violence risk in their decisions. – KT*

This theme came up multiple times when KT spoke about the roadblocks they had encountered when advocating for tamariki. In one example a KT described how well-intentioned actions created sustained precarity for a child, as decision-makers had not made explicit links between the Mum's situation and the family violence. The mother's strengths were disregarded in favour of harsh judgement based on the perception that she was not doing enough to protect her children from their father's violence.

> *I mean Mum wasn't an angel, but at the end of the day services were happy to throw money and support at her wider whānau. Like if they had thrown that same resource at the Mum to have access to courses and extra money so there wasn't financial pressure it would have made it a lot more seamless seven years ago. – KT*

Tamariki gave examples of times they felt *"good and safe"*, namely, when they saw (follow through) action take place after it has been promised (or indicated), after they have expressed their wishes or opinions, and after they have disclosed information about their stories of violence. For example, Sam (11) was asked how he knew that his KT was working hard for him, he responded, *"[KT] kept saying 'things are going to get better', and then they did."* Unfortunately for tamariki, follow-through action was not universally experienced, and information regarding their family violence victimisation was not always relayed, included, or applied by others.

> *[My son's] lawyer pushed his case to someone else and didn't pass on or address the fact he didn't want to be seeing his Dad every week now. [My son] said an absolute 'no', because he felt unsafe with Dad, and they didn't bother to pass that to the next lawyer. – Mum*

> ***You need a good lawyer that listens to you and communicates for you which is really hard to find on legal aid. You need a decent lawyer for child. It sounds so simple, but it is not. Once [my son] did his evidential, OT closed the case right there and then, I'm like 'what!?'. And because the case was closed the judge thought 'sweet we are almost on the track to having this sorted'. Now it feels like no one has done anything and we are nowhere.** – Mum*

A casenote relating to a family court judgement demonstrates that even with the support of KNR, immediate and future risks can be created and exacerbated for children when decision-making does not contextualise their experiences of family violence, and when the wants and needs of children are misinterpreted.

> ***[Mum] has stated that [Dad (perpetrator)] was found not guilty at the hearing last week and the judge said that because [the children] said "love you bye" to him, he couldn't rule [the family violence] to be that impactful. [Mum] said that she is absolutely devastated and was numb for a lot of the weekend and really struggled to give evidence in court and could hardly speak. [Mum] said that the fact judges keep ruling in favour of [Dad] who is still being abusive, and discounting the emotional toll it is having on the kids and her lives is so unbelievable.** – KT*

KT explained that this was often due to the lack of time court actors devoted to understanding what children truly want and need, especially when they based their judgment of what is in the child's best interests on a singular and lacklustre interaction.

> *So, [other agency staff] are happy that they are meeting with the kid once, a kid they don't know, and without the parent or whoever is supporting them, without them even knowing who their safe person is. – KT*

What makes it hard is because when [other services] do have a staff member to come and talk to a child you are lucky if you [the KT] is going to be invited to the interview or advised that it is even happening. – KT

KT who had experience advocating for numerous clients through state mandated systems agreed that safety remained an issue for the clients in part because of the discernible gap between a family violence-informed perspective of need and the decisions and actions by systems with the most power to either increase risk or increase safety for whānau. To them, these seemed irreconcilable, and limited the potential for KNR to create ongoing safety for tamariki.

It can feel like all our work is a waste, we are not getting what we need for kids and our whole point of advocacy is to be their voice and they have come to you with their voice, you kept that safe, but where is the action, if it is not going to be rolled out, [then there's] no improvement for that child's safety, for that life. Advocacy has let them down, [they might think] 'let's not talk about our feelings anymore, let's not actually share what is going on at home'. – KT

Tangata whenua KT, in particular, raised the additional injustice they observed when their nuanced understanding of the multiple layers of violence and disadvantage was not heard or shared within systems or services that exercised power over the lives of tamariki and their mothers. They felt that for tamariki Māori, such unsafe decision-making likely reinforced systemic betrayal and perpetuated generational distrust in helping and legal systems.

It creates doubt in the system, and this is how [distrust] grows and it is becomes generational. Then your whānau are probably going to be telling you the story, the horror stories, of what happened and why they distrust and then they see this and that validates. Then it continues. – KT

So, breaking the cycle is more about breaking the cycle of just inaction, you know, of feeling betrayed. Because they are the ones who have the power to change the system. We [KT] don't have the power, like there are vulnerable children, there are vulnerable families, they are just trying to get food on the table for the kids, they are just trying to have a house for them, they are trying to just survive, do normal stuff and not get stigmatised or racially profiled when they ask for help. – KT

Through such betrayal of children's expressed needs and willingness to express their needs, their safety both in the present and future is undermined. In addition, KT felt it also undermined the progress they had already made toward safety with their tamariki clients: when the scaffolding for safety is predicated on the trusting and reliable relationship with KT, the statutory processes that sabotage its effectiveness negate and discourage the continuation of trust and transparency. **Accordingly, KT felt 'safe' system responses must understand family violence and coercion and their relationship to 'risk', and proactively meet children's needs for continuity and care in the way they find most safety-promoting.**

One KT gives a final and compelling example of how the moving parts of the harakeke must work together for the rito at the centre to thrive; and how in reverse, the failure by one protective component negates the safety offered by each of the others.

> *We went to an FGC and I had a [family violence] report [to share] because of this very vulnerable little client. I was stopped within 2 minutes of reading the report and they said they questioned whether the family violence was relevant and questioned whether this is a complaint [about their practice] or if this is actually about the child. It was not a pleasant situation. I obviously was like 'this is the relevance, here are the risks, this is what we've done, and we [KT and client] are wanting this'. Meanwhile this little girl is confused and sad cause she doesn't know when she gets to talk to Mum. I'm a safe person for her, and I can't answer that for her, which then feels unsafe. I was sitting there being like you have to meet us somewhere. They still didn't hear my concerns for her. It ended up that we had to pull out of this child's advocacy, not because they dismissed me, but they shut us out because these agencies have the power compared to us as child advocates, they have all the say, we are against a brick wall. They literally ignored all the safety risks that we have been yelling about. I am worried that this will happen again. I am still worried that this child is not safe, that plays on my mind every day.* – KT

In sum, while the preliminary portrayal of KNR reflects a service that tamariki and their Mums find instrumental to their present safety and their future safety prospects, it needs the institutional backing, statutory positioning and power, and enhanced systemic efficacy to be fully potentiated.

At present, the limitations in system responsiveness for tamariki, who are continuously impacted by family violence, represent limitations in how safe tamariki can possibly be right now, and how safe they are likely to perceive system engagement to be in the future. The implications of such structural shortfalls are further explored in the discussion section of this report, alongside the benefits and practice imperatives of Kōkihi ngā Rito as a pilot.

Kaiārahi Tamariki collectively agreed that KNR works most effectively for tamariki when the people, services, and systems that interact with them work together with the interests and rights of the children at the forefront of their decision making and action.

Discussion

Why 'safety'?

Family violence can be storied in multiple ways. The most known stories of family violence and children, however, are those narrated by adults – almost exclusively without input from children themselves.[41] In an Aotearoa context, there are two overarching stories of origin that reflect and derive from women's and children's lived experiences of it: the story of colonisation, and the story of gendered oppression and consequent power disparities that harm women and children.[42] These stories of origin are interwoven. Marginalisation on the basis of age and gender is arguably a by-product of colonisation,[43] and results in a layering of different types of violence – gendered and colonial[44] – in the lives of women and children.

In everyday life, these stories play out through the multitude of purposeful, harmful, and often invisible coercive and abusive tactics perpetrators draw upon to control and command their victims. The perceived acceptability of these tactics is shaped by the settings of the stories of violence.[45] For Māori mothers, for example, the efficacy of perpetrators' tactics is informed by intersecting systems of oppression that negate their access to welfare and care, and which subject them to racial and gendered prejudice.[46] Few pathways carved out by the State are perceived as free of risk to many wāhine Māori, and may be used by perpetrators to facilitate ongoing violence and their entrapment of victims.[47]

These contemporary forms of structural disadvantage are reflected in family violence mortality[48] and suicide mortality statistics,[49] especially suicides of wāhine and tamariki that are linked to known experiences of violent victimisation.[50] The stories of tamariki laid out in this report attest to the ways they experience systems of power and decision-making that do not always best serve their interests or their safety. The profound impacts of both gendered oppression and colonisation are then often exacerbated and prolonged by discriminatory attitudes to (and interventions in) the lives of wāhine[51] and tamariki Māori,[52] perpetuating the intergenerational cycle of structural disadvantage that both fosters vulnerability to family violence and disables access to sustainable safety.[53]

'Safety' is inherently subjective. When we began this evaluation, our conceptualisation of the benefits of child-led family violence support were focused on whether and to what extent children's safety-related needs were met. The outcomes of the pilot (and the process by which they were achieved) expanded our understanding of the reality and dispersion of children's safety needs – both present and future. These outcomes focused on how safety was formed and fortified, and how it functioned in response to the needs associated with the ongoing and enduring risks (and impacts) of violence. Tamariki left KNR safer than when they arrived, and we, in turn, were left with enhanced awareness of how safety is constituted and how it is tenuous – and the implications for doing safety work that actually works for tamariki.

Safety from what? The risks tamariki come in with

Kōkihi ngā Rito (KNR) worked with the most at-risk tamariki. They were at risk of being hurt or killed by perpetrators of family violence, and at risk of losing their mothers (their main source of love, safety, and identity) to homicide. At the time of their entry into KNR, their risk and needs assessments showed that the scale, scope, and severity of risks to themselves and their whānau was the worst it had been in their lives to date.

As the findings showed, 100 percent of the KNR tamariki were afraid of their perpetrators. Most of their files also showed one or more indicators of the risk of family violence homicide, such as the perpetrator holding them hostage, physically assaulting their Mums while they were pregnant, or threatening to kill them.

Their perpetrators' use of violence in their pasts, their presents, and prospective futures gave rise to a spectrum of risks that pervaded their lives and childhoods within and beyond their whānau and homes. For some, the risk of further and severe violence never truly subsided. However, 'risk' is a moving target in children's lives. Even when the risk of physical harm to them is reduced, their lives are impacted both by the tide of family violence itself and the ripple of impacts that disrupt the landscape of their lives.

Kōkihi ngā Rito's approach to safety encompasses both immediate physical safety and safety from longer-term impacts of family violence. It departs from the artificial distinction between *'safety risk'* and *'risk of adverse outcomes'* by accounting for the multiplicity and temporality of risks to children.

Focusing on physical safety alone is unlikely to address the ripple of impacts that, if unchecked, sabotage children's futures. Equally, targeting the outer layer 'problems' precipitated by violence does not stem the tide of violence or likelihood of recurrent harm. The diagram below, taken from the findings, shows how many singular 'issues' for tamariki can be tracked back to a common cause: a perpetrator's use of violence.

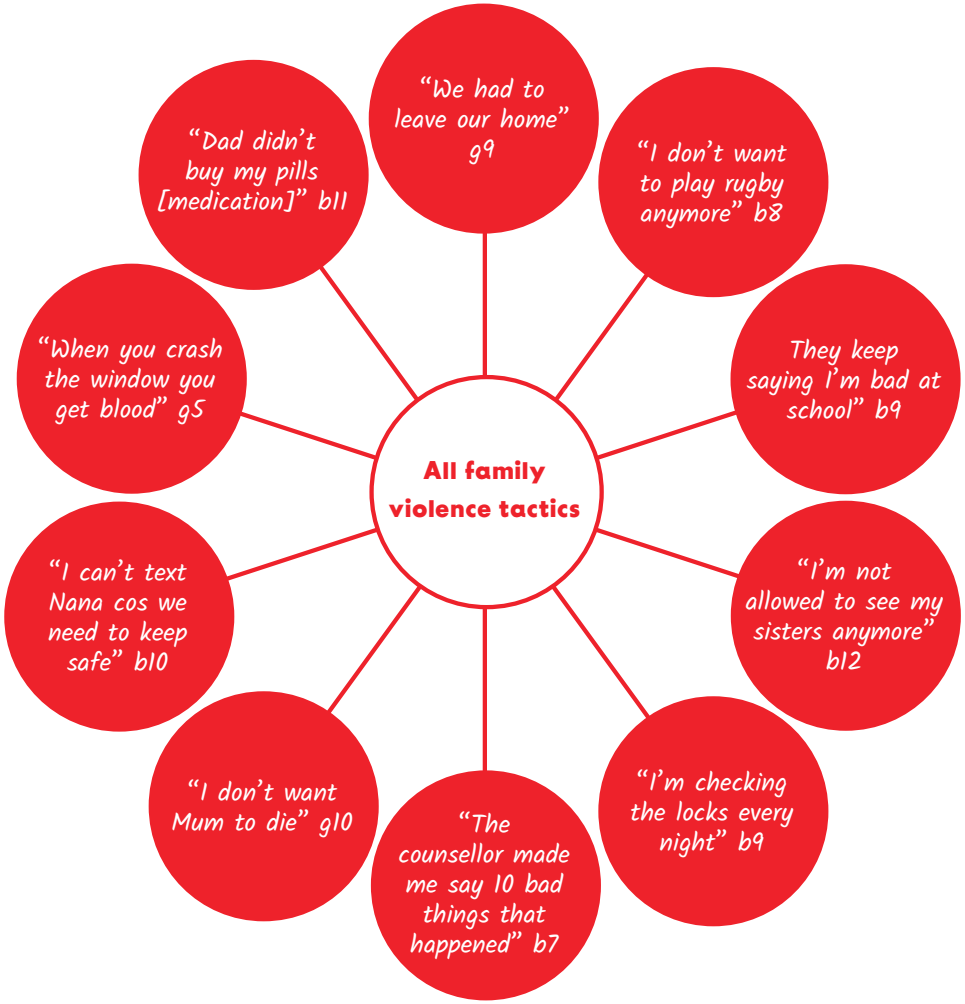


Diagram of individual impacts of family violence in the lives of KNR tamariki.

Re-thinking 'risk' and 'outcomes' for tamariki

The range of risks derived from family violence are not always recognisable at face value as a consequence of the violence. As the diagram based on safety-focused support for KNR kids shows, specific representations of 'risk' (e.g. *"we had to leave our home"* or *"I'm not allowed to see my sisters"*) can be viewed as standalone issues for children and addressed in isolation. Alternatively, when interpreted through the specialist lens of KNR, they are identified as family violence-related risks.

Perpetrators' abuse tactics led to numerous risks to the stability of children's lives, often in gradual, cumulative, or insidious ways that did not necessarily end, even in perpetrators' absence. For instance, refusing sufficient access to family money or threatening their Mums to an extent that tamariki had to move schools and towns did not require perpetual proximity, but still rendered tamariki powerless and prevented their physical, emotional, and relational needs from being met. As the findings on 'working with whānau' show, both victimisation and the cognitive, emotional, and practical safety demands taxed their Mums' parenting capacity and parenting authority – thereby sabotaging children's day-to-day stability.[5455] These examples of family violence 'risk' lay the foundations for sustained social precarity and eventual adverse outcomes for tamariki.

Kōkihi ngā Rito offers a comprehensive snapshot of family violence risk in all its forms through child-specific risk and needs assessments. As shown by the 'setting' sections of the findings, impacts on children's lives continue well beyond the initial period of crisis. When information about the breadth of ways family violence has created risk for a tamaiti is compiled and presented, it gives a comprehensive snapshot of potential future adversity. We found, for example, that family violence threatened children's housing, their material provision, the stability and functioning of their caregivers and whānau relationships, the predictability of their households, their sense of control over their lives, and their capacities, freedoms, and opportunities in school, interest-based activities, and friendships.

It is widely acknowledged that family violence puts tamariki at risk of adverse outcomes,[56] including poor physical health;[57] anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder;[58] self-harm and suicide;[59] social and developmental issues;[60] and family violence perpetration or victimisation in adulthood.[61] There is no consensus, however, on what services or support effectively disrupt the causal mechanisms of these outcomes or restores children's prospects. Family violence services targeting tamariki tend to fall into one of two groups. The first are safety interventions for critical risks, which are imposed on whānau and rarely target the gradual and insidious mechanisms of harm. In contrast, the second group of service initiatives involve direct support for children, which is almost exclusively delivered via clinical and individualistic intervention aimed at improving children's knowledge, skills, awareness, and emotional and behavioural functioning.[62]

The core purpose and functions of KNR appear to fill a conspicuous service gap relating to children's safety from family violence. For example, most of the services listed in the 'violence and abuse – youth' category of the Ministry of Social Development's directory[63] do not focus on family violence specifically. There is a greater focus on building children's behavioural, emotional, and social capabilities, as per the table below. Many have cost implications for families. Unlike Kōkihi ngā Rito, none of the services listed in this category identified intensive, family violence specialist advocacy for children as a primary function.

Safety planning	8
Crisis management	17
General whānau advocacy/case work	20
Family violence psychoeducation	19
Counselling	40
Building emotion regulation, conflict resolution, or behavioural skills	13
Empowerment or self-esteem	17
Stopping harmful behaviour	16
Mentoring	13
Group programmes for life/social skills or personal development	16
Drug and alcohol services	7
Open-ended, one-to-one support for tamariki premised on support to make their lives safer from family violence	**0**

Tamariki experience immense benefit from group programmes and other initiatives and see them as instrumental to how they and their whānau cope.[64] However, the logic informing clinical interventions appears predicated on the assumption that emotional and social skills-building interventions in childhood will prevent poor mental health and social outcomes in adulthood. Unsurprisingly, the efficacy evidence of interventions targeting behavioural and emotional functioning in tamariki exposed to family violence is weak at best.[65] Accordingly, we propose that conventional interventions misidentify the links between family violence, the subsequent impacts, and adverse outcomes.

If family violence 'risk' spans every aspect of children's lives and orients what futures are possible and accessible to them, initiatives that focus on safety, restoration, and healing may more effectively mediate the risks of adverse outcomes later in life. In sum, family violence 'risk' in childhood may arguably be indistinguishable from the drivers of 'adverse outcomes' in adulthood.

The point of difference: Centring tamariki as the rito in the harakeke

Unlike other services and initiatives for children, KNR does not target just the outer symptoms, or attribute these to problems originating within a child. Instead, by understanding them as the impact of a perpetrator's use of family violence, they work to reverse these impacts and forestall further harm. Kaiārahi Tamariki (KT) had to work at multiple levels to potentiate children's safety by:

1. ***Recognising*** **the scope, nature, and cause of family violence-related risk and need in the lives of tamariki through purposeful, flexible, child-led, whole-of-whānau engagement.**
2. ***Reversing*** **the ripple of impacts across their lives by offering resources to them and their whānau, overcoming barriers to their access to opportunities and participation, protecting their entitlements to material security, and instrumentalising support.**
3. ***Restoring*** **children's and Mums' wairua, connectedness, and capacity; and offsetting their negative relational experiences and negative self-conceptualisation with affirming and validating responses.**
4. ***Re-setting*** **their sustainable safety and security by bridging (and closing) the gap between how perpetrators undermine the safety of tamariki and whānau, and the capacity and capability of organisations, institutions, and systems to disrupt perpetrators' violence and hold them accountable.**

These layers of safety bear resemblance to many of the imperatives illustrated in Te Tokutoru model of wellbeing set out in *Te Aorerekura* (Government's national strategy to combat family violence). At present, other than the Safe and Together™ model originating with Mandel,[66] there are few models of intervention that aim to forestall adverse outcomes by creating sustainable safety in children's and their mothers' lives, rather than solely administering statutory interventions for safety and/or skills-based interventions for tamariki.

In addition, Kōkihi ngā Rito puts tamariki in charge of the design of their own support. This began with practices of whanaungatanga, such as warmth, authenticity, trust, reliabillity, consistency, hospitality, transparency, and reciprocit. This was followed by an emphasis on tino rangatiratanga - tamariki were encouraged to decide on, lead, change, and direct the content and focus of their work with their KT. A genuinely child-led approach was beneficial to tamariki in several discernible ways, each of which are discussed below.

First, the reflections tamariki discussed in the 'child-led support' section are testament to the value of a child-centred approach in actively combating the powerlessness and helplessness they experienced prior to the pilot. These experiences of powerlessness over their lives can be somewhat restored through a consistent relational and cultural climate that minimises the 'unknowns' around them and promotes their perception of predictability, identity, belonging, personal power, and the likelihood of reliable and safe responses.[67]

Second, as asserted by other authors,[68] emotional safety is not self-restoring the moment children are physically protected from harm: both anticipated and remembered risk are experienced in their emotional present. As children's reflections on their KT (set out in the 'whanaungatanga' section of the findings) show, tamariki experienced greater emotional safety when their KT were attuned to how and when they felt comfortable to share their experiences of and feelings about family violence. This emotional safety was not limited to the duration of sessions, but extended to their home lives, representing a vital component of their safety and recovery.

Third, it shaped the efficacy of support children experienced by ensuring it was responsive to how they, as the rito at the centre both of their whānau and of the service, expressed what was important to them. In the 'child-led support' section, the findings recount children's emphasis on support *'just for them'*; a rarity in services largely oriented to the needs of adults and whānau as singular units. Studies show children who are encouraged to exercise their decision-making power invest more in both the process and desired outcomes of services[69] and those whose contributions are welcomed and enacted receive support more tailored to their individual needs.[70]

While KNR involved children's whānau, the focal point of the service was the child, the smallest component of the whānau - the one commanding the least epistemic power. For KT, centring tamariki meant the design of support to meet tamariki where they were at. Other family violence-specific support services for children are typically time-bound, leaving tamariki with unfulfilled needs and enduring worry about future safety.[71] For indigenous tamariki in particular, time-bound and pathology-based approaches are unlikely to be safety-generating, and are inferior to culturally sustaining approaches that engage communities in restoration and healing.[72] As Cram et al.[73] point out, the burden of culturally inadequate, fractured, or individualistic services is often shouldered by clients and can reinforce perceptions of intervention as hostile or unresponsive. In contrast, the child-led approach used in Kōkihi ngā Rito offered an amorphous design of time, place, and pace, including the 'wavering door' set out in the findings to ensure support only ended when children felt their needs were met.

KNR tamariki, like their mothers, were often subjected to coercive control. Perpetrators of family violence often abuse both women and children, and view both as property to be owned and controlled.[74] There are many similarities in children's and women's experiences of violence. Like their mothers, children actively strategise to reduce the risks of perpetrators' violence by demonstrating their loyalty and affection.[75] Similarly, like their mothers, the family violence takes away many of their opportunities to have their vital emotional, social, and relational needs met.[76] Yet the way tamariki experience both family violence and support are specific to them as tamariki. Although the body of literature on children's experiences of specialist support after family violence is in its infancy, it suggests that children's experiences are both equivalent to and divergent from those of adults.[77]

Our findings echo this; children's stories underlined how safety actions specific to them as tamariki, in the context of their unique experience of childhood, were vital parts of a broader sequence of safety-related advocacy. Accordingly, they collectively identified five indicators of advocacy that effectively made them safer from family violence.

1. They got support through tailored, targeted advocacy from someone who was attuned to tamariki, their voices and perspectives, and their experiences of family violence, and took the time for whanaungatanga with them and their whānau.
2. They could talk openly and confidently about family violence, perpetrators, and safety with their Kaiārahi Tamariki.
3. They enjoyed spending time with their Kaiārahi Tamariki at times and places that worked for them, led the pace, focus, and priorities of that support, stayed engaged until they were confident their needs were met, and made use of the 'revolving door' of support.
4. Their Mums were recognised as their main and most sustained source of support, and were unburdened from the weighty emotional, practical, and material impacts of family violence.
5. The full scope of risks and impacts of family violence were identified and consistently addressed, welcomed into conversations, and framed in ways that commanded the safest possible responses from other people, services, and systems.

KNR's emphasis on recording children's voices within the casefiles we reviewed is testament to the efficacy of the dual focus ('tamariki' and 'family violence') and the inseparability of the two in achieving efficacy. Goal plans, for instance, that linked a child's story of violence with the 'actions' they ask for (e.g. "he wants me to continue to be kind to him") show both universality and distinction. Their safety goals and the methods by which they are achieved were all about safety from family violence, but are distinctly informed by how tamariki experience and express that safety.

The table below (introduced earlier in this report) outlines the values and explanation of their enactment within KNR, alongside the actions discernible from the findings that collectively represent how the values gave rise to sustained safety for tamariki after family violence.

Te Ao Māori values	Advocacy explanation	Actions
Te tapu o te tamaiti – Acknowledging and understanding the sacredness of a tamaiti and using this to ensure the safety of the tamaiti is paramount	Tamariki are positioned as primary clients, deserving of advocacy that nurtures their wairua and mana. Every part of who they are is worthy of safety promoting advocacy, that leads to real change.	• Providing specialised, tailored, child-centred support after family violence • Understanding the distinct family violence safety needs of children • Understanding the distinct status needs of children • Accurately documenting family violence and the impacts as they relate to tamariki • Providing long term, flexible support for the ongoing impacts of family violence • Providing relational, cultural, social, and systems level family violence support
Whanaungatanga – Relationships for tamariki are encouraged for growth and development.	Whanaungatanga lays the foundation for all possible future safety. Advocacy is genuine, meaningful, and strong. Nurturing relationships with tamariki informs the way you can grow and develop safety together.	• Fostering genuine, supportive connections with tamariki • Truly hearing the wants and needs of tamariki as they relate to family violence • Giving age appropriate and transparent information regarding family violence, support options, and impacts
Whakapapa – Tamariki are encouraged to explore all aspects of who they are, growing their sense of identity and belonging.	Know your tamariki clients; know who they are and who they want to be, so that advocacy can accurately reflect and represent their needs. Explore their curiosity about themselves and their world; support them to connect with all the parts that make them whole. Understand what safety looks like to them.	• Understanding what tamariki want, hearing their opinions, and reflecting their voice in helping systems • Exploring how family violence can impact tamaiti identity and sense of self • Working with and for Mum and safe whānau to build safety from family violence • Creating safe spaces to speak about perpetrators' use of family violence

Te Ao Māori values	Advocacy explanation	Actions
Koha mai, koha atu – Allowing for the tamaiti to share and receive in a way that is best for them.	Every tamaiti is full of knowledge, ability, and hope. Safety is determined by what and how they share - their opinions, wishes, and experiences. Support tamariki to pick their own paths, to explore and own their rangatiratanga. Be flexible and understand of their evolving experiences of violence, and safety.	• Being led by tamariki • Building support tailored to each tamaiti and their individual experiences of family violence • Providing advocacy that unburdens Mum and disrupts the impacts of family violence • Returning power back to tamariki in the aftermath of family violence
Te mana o te tamaiti – Acknowledging that each tamaiti possesses strengths in their own ways.	Partner with tamariki and work hard for them. Every advocacy action is for their safety. Harness their strength to help them understand their journeys through family violence so they can feel confident about having safety in their futures.	• Treating tamariki as experts in their own lives, with opinions that are valid and unique to them • Providing practical and real safety planning so that tamariki experience actualised safety from family violence • Supporting tamariki to navigate services and systems to reshape their lives as a result of family violence • Provide sustainable safety and future planning as it relates to the impacts of family violence

The power to build safety

Every adult, proximal to a child after family violence, impacts their safety, wellbeing, and future prospects – even if unknowingly or unintentionally. Some adults hold more power in the lives of tamariki than others: Mums, Dads, whānau, and (as tamariki expressed to us) advocates who become 'like whānau'. The findings explore who and what was involved and influential in the pursuit of safety from family violence. We consequently set out the divisions of power and role as they relate to the potential to make tamariki safer from family violence.

Tamariki

Tamariki did safety work of their own accord both prior to and within KNR. While children are argued to have inherent capability to make sense of their relational worlds and resist oppression,[78] their developmental capacity and social positioning limits their use of this capability; their access to social resources and social power is not equal to that of adults and grows gradually as children grow.[79] Accordingly, peppered throughout the findings are endless examples of tamariki resisting both the violence and its impacts: thinking through safety strategies, trying to process perpetrators' behaviour, not speaking when it felt unsafe to, taking care of their siblings, using distraction, and disclosing the violence to others, to name but a few. However, their power to change the enactment of family violence was minimal; no child's skills (coping), capabilities (resilience), or understanding, could in of itself safeguard them from a perpetrator's choice to find them and use violence against them or against their mothers.

As some KNR tamariki were largely kept insulated from the violence by their mothers when cohabiting with both parents, their setting of family violence 'risk' had only recently and drastically changed. Physical separation from their perpetrators catalysed an increase in the scope, reach, and visibility of the family violence, and an intensification of the impacts on these tamariki. The burdens they then faced were immense; they continued to sacrifice their time, physical and mental energy, effort, capacity, and childhood freedoms just to exist within and navigate their daily lives in the aftermath. These efforts, while safety-promoting, incurred personal cost to tamariki that required external support and capacity (such as that provided within Kōkihi ngā Rito) to reduce or ameliorate.

Whānau

As introduced above, most interventions targeted at tamariki aim to create safety and wellbeing *within* tamariki, rather than *for* tamariki – in other words, they predominantly aim to treat the symptoms, not the cause. Yet only recently has practice with and for tamariki begun to crossover with specialist family violence support for whānau, in recognition that for tamariki to be safe and well, the social context of their protective whānau must be safe and well too. Tamariki spoke mostly about Mums and Dads, and so this section focuses on the power and roles of each in shaping safety and outcomes for tamariki.

Most of the KNR tamariki had to carry the weight of numerous potential futures in which the perpetrator continues to use violence, and in some cases uses childcare arrangements as an effective instrument of coercion.[8081] These tamariki faced a double-bind of vulnerability: while their safe adults' capacity was temporarily redirected to safety-seeking and coping, tamariki also acquired a weighty burden of safety-related responsibilities and strategies. Often, the spectre of prospective future harm represented greater emotional and practical burdens than past harm.

Their relationships with their mothers (primary safe caregivers), however, were perceived by both tamariki participants and their Mums as a fundamental facilitator of safety that spanned beyond the duration of KNR. As the 'whānau' section of the findings demonstrates, their Mums were their principal (and most permanent) source of safety and the people who tirelessly devoted their time and effort to safeguarding, supporting, and caring for them. In turn, kids acknowledged their interconnectedness with their Mums, despite being subject to gendered societal messages that give rise to children's harsh judgement of mothering abilities in the context of family violence.[82] Their perceptions of the overlap between their own and their Mums' journeys counters deeply embedded beliefs about the role of tamariki within whānau and the assignation of responsibility for care.

Despite the common concern about children living with family violence experiencing 'parentification' (fulfilling parent-type roles in a reversal of their true role as children), child-centred research shows children are voluntarily and naturally active in creating, participating in, and reinforcing mutual and reciprocal relationships of care and support. These studies argue that children are undermined by negative depictions of their relational agency in the exchanges of care with their parents.[83] Correspondingly, the caring and interdependence we witnessed and recorded throughout our interviews with kids and their Mums arguably represented the potential for loving relationships to flourish as the stranglehold of perpetrators' control was loosened.

Our findings echo those of Katz'[84] study on children and mothers, which showed remarkably consistent portrayals of how their interpersonal knowledge and relationships with each other were mutually deepened through the process of safety and recovery, and Mullender's et al. study[85] of children impacted by family violence, which found the purposeful deepening of mother-child relationships was pivotal to their coping and recovery. In sum, children are not passive recipients of parental care, but rather are active and influential in relationships with their proximal caregivers.[86]

The findings of this study and others counter the still-prevailing perception of children as lacking relational agency and acting only as 'passive bystanders'[87] whose recovery is only enabled by perfect parenting. Their experiences are arguably better conceptualised by Te Ao Māori principles; a mutually interdependent exchange and upholding of wairua, in which their very essence is linked by whānau ties and fosters a naturalised exchange of care, supported and enhanced by the feeding or nurturance of wairua for both individually. As Mums so plainly spoke about, having burdens removed from them and having their mana as mothers affirmed and reinforced helped to replenish their wairua, providing greater reserves from which to fuel the wairua of their tamariki.

In contrast, while their Mums' decisions enabled the uplifting of their wairua, the decisions made by their perpetrators (most often their Dads) did not. The tamariki participating in this evaluation were often trapped in child access arrangements with perpetrators that did not serve their personal or collective impression of safety, thus undermining the potential for KNR to change the ending of their stories of family violence risk and adversity. They were not oblivious to this risk. They readily named both the violence and the perpetrator of it, and their anticipation of further violence traversed their recollections of support alongside their hopefulness about safe and thriving futures.

Patently, children's lives are curated by the impacts of perpetrators' use of family violence tactics, even when perpetrators are no longer active or present in their lives. For instance, tamariki and their Mums talked about moving schools, having less money, losing contact with their friends, struggling to find housing, having to think about the violence every time they went to court, and thinking about the risks of violence every night when they went to bed. As other studies interrogating the role of helping systems in children's safety have found, perpetrators' use of family violence in children's households is always a *parenting* decision as much as a relationship decision.[88] The child's safety and wellbeing are not separate from this pattern of harm.[89] Instead, they become unwitting participants and continue to experience the instability of the perpetrator's violence,[90] and at times are used as a means of access for the perpetrator to continue to control or abuse their Mums.[91]

Fathers who are the perpetrators of violence in their children's lives have the most power to change the risks – and associated adverse impacts – by choosing to stop using violence. There is ample research documenting the severe (and foreseeable) risks of perpetrators harming their children as well as their partners.[92] Their decisions, however, are rarely explicated in the written versions of how children experience violence, while children's mothers, even as protective parents coping with the bulk of the safety and recovery-related care for their children, are habitually over-scrutinised. As Katz[93] points out, mothers, not fathers, are typically and almost exclusively expected to fulfil all nurturing and caregiving roles relating to their children's safety, wellbeing, and development, while a 'good enough' father is only expected to be generally non-violent and occasionally reinforce mothers' good parenting.[94] Even in Kōkihi ngā Rito, Kaiārahi Tamariki reflected on the practice shift that the explicit recording of family violence information and the attribution of risk to perpetrators represented: identifying how family violence gave rise to risks in children's lives advanced their understanding of who was doing what to whom – and the cumulative impacts of perpetrating parents' decisions on their children's lives.

Services

The adverse impacts of exposure to family violence are well-documented. However, unlike many other instances of trauma or adversity, the extent to which children's physical health, emotional wellbeing, and social functioning are negatively impacted is highly dependent on whether the violence is permitted to continue. The use of terms such as 'resilience' and 'trauma-informed' have gained traction in recent decades as a principal ethic of care but they may not go far enough in addressing the spread of impacts from family violence. The experience of 'trauma' is often depicted as a wound to the psyche of individuals, requiring individual healing to restore wellbeing. Family violence, on the other hand, is typically ongoing and with ongoing impacts – as is apparent throughout children's and their Mums' excerpts.

Morris, Humphrey, and Hegarty's[95] research found that while the precise journey of safety-seeking looks different for each child, it relies on practitioners identifying opportunities for safety that are specific to that child. For instance, the "absent presence" of perpetrators, or the continued effects of their behaviour, undermine prospective safety avenues for children. In short, unlike other kinds of trauma or adversity where help-seeking typically catalyses the beginning of 'recovery', family violence cannot be presumed to be solely a past experience - nor one that principally impacts the mind. Family violence traumatises the social system in which tamariki are embedded, rather than simply the psyche of individuals. For KNR tamariki, family violence trauma was cumulative and ongoing at the time tamariki became engaged with service.

As exhibited throughout the findings, tamariki offered extensive insight into how organisational practices can prevent the spread of family violence-related trauma specifically by recognising risk, reversing harm, and restoring capacity and opportunity for safety from further violence. They identified the following facilitators of safety and wellbeing within their experiences of support:

- Purposeful relationship building with tamariki and the safe people in their whānau, insofar as tamariki want and drive that and based on who they consider whānau;
- The consistent application of a safety-focused, family violence-responsive approach, including safety plans and strategies that are upheld by adults and practicable and meaningful for kids;
- A flexible approach to advocacy and service design, including capacity-building advocacy for their Mums;
- Open-ended and culturally responsive support that is child-led and caters to their preferences, priorities, risks, and needs, keeps family violence at the forefront and gives opportunities to process and learn about their experiences with perpetrators, and only comes to a close when children decide; and
- Utilising adult epistemic status and social power to advocate for tamariki so their rights are upheld (above the rights of their perpetrators).

These imperatives are rarely featured collectively in the literature on children's support after family violence. For instance, giving visibility to the violence and explanation to the impacts on Mums' capacity, strengthens the viability of safety pathways, but is not a common feature of services for kids, as discussed below.[96] KNR also found relatively unexplored opportunities for restoration, such as by unburdening Mums to counteract the additional demands that victimisation and its impacts imposed on their parenting capacity,[97] and drawing together the voiced family violence experiences of tamariki and Mums to enhance their shared understanding of each other's experiences.[98]

Systems and institutional responses

In the findings relating to how the voices of tamariki were heard and elevated within formal systems (such as with lawyers and the court), kids and their Mums underlined how difficult it is for people with institutional decision-making power to make safe decisions about their lives if they do not comprehend or attribute significance to the backdrop of perpetrators' behaviour. At the time of interviewing, perpetrators' access to opportunities to use violence were both legally and socially bound[99] for many of the tamariki. Even deploying all of their strengths and strategies, protective parenting cannot circumnavigate the associated risks to tamariki.[100]

Tamariki wanted contact with their perpetrating fathers – but only when that contact is safe and feels safe. Too often, these safety considerations were ignored by those with decision-making power, and their contact with perpetrators was mandated without first establishing the preconditions of actual or perceived safety for children. Several KNR tamariki were forced into unsafe situations such as spending time alone with the abusive parent or with inadequate supervision, and compelled to spend time without the person representing their primary and often sole source of sustained safety.[101] The legislative setting of children's safety, and the artificial distinction it imposes on the risks to mothers and the risks to children[102] is consequently as pivotal to their experiences of safety (and imagined futures) as their home setting is.

While some tamariki and their Mums named examples of positive and safety-facilitating systems responses (e.g. committed lawyers or proactive police responses), many found court systems to be complicit in their ongoing risk.

Both kids' and their Mums' frustration, disillusionment, and sense of futility from system interactions are perceptible throughout their recollections in the findings, particularly in the 'case studies' and 'barriers to safety' sections. While their perpetrators cannot be compelled to change their behaviour, they *can* be held accountable for their decisions to put their children at risk – but rarely are. As Mandel[103] highlights, when perpetrating parents' actions are not perceived as an ongoing threat to children's safety, children are condemned to living with continued threat, reinforcing their felt powerlessness and perceptions of intervention as unhelpful and uncaring. These concerns are frequently raised by family violence researchers[104] and practitioners[105] pointing out the need for perpetrators' actions and associated risks to be expertly analysed and inform safe decision-making by judicial and child protection actors.[106]

While there are some notable exceptions,[107] attribution of fathers' parenting responsibilities, including for their own use of violence around their children, is comparatively scarce,[108] despite perpetual responsibilisation of mothers' parenting. For example, Callaghan's terminology analysis of studies on children and family violence found "mothers" was the fifth most frequently appearing term, while "fathers" was only the 147th most frequent.[109] In addition, legal discourses typically demonstrate 'identity-splitting' between the roles of 'father' and 'perpetrator', especially within family court proceedings.[110] The findings show how tamariki accounts of family violence were recorded by KT as they were made manifest and then evolved in their lives. However, for these tamariki, the helping system rarely links 'risk' to its original cause – the actions of the perpetrator.

Explicating the parenting choices of both the parent who is perpetrating violence and the parent who is victimised and still caring for their tamariki shapes how responsibility is assigned. If a perpetrator's use of violence foregrounds the consideration of protective parenting, both the attribution of responsibility for harm and the attribution of responsibility for safety are more accurate, nuanced, and safety-promoting. Accordingly, 'safe' decision-making in the aftermath of family violence requires mapping of the perpetrator's pattern of violence, the primary victim's responses to that violence, and the cumulative impacts on the functioning and stability of the whānau.[111]

Leaving safer than when they arrived

Throughout the findings, tamariki articulated the ways they are safer now (and have the foundations for sustainable safety now) than when they entered Kōkihi ngā Rito. Given safety-focused advocacy was child-led and shaped around each child's unique experiences of family violence and risk, we do not attempt to catalogue every safety outcome for tamariki clients. However, the following table of examples are illustrative of the breadth of what constituted 'safety outcomes' for tamariki.

Risk category	Examples of KNR-facilitated safety outcomes	Limitations to safety beyond the scope of KNR
Risks to children's wellbeing, connectedness, and use of voice	• Tamariki have safe and warm relationships with Kaiārahi Tamariki and have fun memories with them; • Tamariki feel safe enough to share their experiences and disclose further family violence risks over time; • Tamariki are supported in ways that are flexible, individualised to their needs and ages, and work for them when (and how) they need it; • Tamariki lead the type, pace, and breadth of safety work and are in control of how long they get support for; • Tamariki voices are represented in contexts where others have the power to make decisions that affect their lives; • Tamariki are proud of their own successes and progress and confident to share their achievements with people closest to them; and • Tamariki demonstrate increased self-confidence.	Perpetrators are at times still present in or on the periphery of kids' lives and may continue to cause harm to their relationships, use of voice, and emotional/mental equilibrium. The perpetrator figure is rarely resolved in entirety to tamariki because of this continued (or potential) presence, and mental preoccupation with future risk is likely to continue to some extent.
Risks to their Mums' emotional, practical, material, and parenting capacity	• Mums are supported as the Mums of tamariki clients • Tamariki have improved relationships and communication with their Mums and others in their whānau; • Mums have more parenting capacity and are unburdened by outstanding material needs, immediate shortfalls in household budgets, relentless caregiving responsibilities, and excessive safety and administrative workloads; • Mums feels validated, supported, and no longer isolated; • Tamariki spend time with safe adults to give Mum respite time, and Mums' wairua is uplifted and they are freer from the strain of parental coping and caregiving; • Mums have a clearer understanding of how perpetrators' use of violence impacted them and their tamariki, and does not blame themselves for the family violence; and • Mums are more confident in and proud of their protective parenting and capabilities.	The harm to Mums' emotional, practical, and material resources is unlikely to be entirely reversed through their involvement with KNR. Mums still bear the enormity of sole or almost sole provision of their children's day-to-day care and nurturance, while often financially, socially, and practically impacted by the family violence and its consequences. Just as tamariki expressed a need for 'more' of all of the positive benefits of KNR, their Mums need 'more' respite, material assistance, support, and validation beyond the time-span of KNR.

Risk category	Examples of KNR-facilitated safety outcomes	Limitations to safety beyond the scope of KNR
Risks to children's physical safety and exposure to more of the perpetrators' violence	• Tamariki have safety plans that they feel comfortable with and are confident enacting; • Tamariki feel safe enough to disclose things that make them feel unsafe, ashamed, or worried; • Tamariki have increased confidence in enacting safety strategies, and the corresponding reduced mental workload and risk preoccupation; • The risks to tamariki are heard in criminal and family court; • Police and Refuge work together to safeguard whānau and hold perpetrators accountable; • Services and systems (including child protection) interacting with them have the family violence information they need in a format that has the most potential to assist them in their decision-making about long-term safety; and • Safer decisions about their lives are being made by other agencies and systems (enabled by specialist advocacy using comprehensive information about family violence and its impacts on the tamariki and their whānau and household functioning).	Even when KNR achieves all of its potential for supporting tamariki, perpetrators may continue to use violence against them or against their mothers. KNR tamariki referenced perpetrators' continued opportunities to use violence, which were only variably constrained by law enforcement and justice efforts. System responses to family violence perpetrators, such as by lawyers, judges, and child protection services, did not uniformly hold perpetrators accountable and make decisions that forestalled perpetrators' access to tamariki and their Mums, representing both an actual and perceived future threat in their lives.
Risks to household stability, recovery, and healing for tamariki and their whānau	Tamariki have secure medium-term housing; Tamariki understand more about violence, victimisation, and perpetration, and know they are not responsible for the violence or its impacts on their whānau; Tamariki have a safe space and safe people to help make sense of their thoughts and feelings about their Dads; Children's experiences, preferences, and input are recorded safely, taken seriously, and used to make their lives easier and safer; Tamariki have an improved understanding of and ways of coping with their mental health;	Insufficient material resourcing and the spectre of unknown future risk resulting from prolonged and unresponsive interactions with courts and other system actors both impede the structural safety accessible to tamariki.

Risk category	Examples of KNR-facilitated safety outcomes	Limitations to safety beyond the scope of KNR
	Tamariki have increased awareness of and ownership over personal and whānau strengths and skills; Tamariki have increased capability for emotional regulation and communication of needs and boundaries; Tamariki can anticipate what is happening next, when, and why; Kids' whānau are all on the same page about what they need and how best to support them; Tamariki have increased understanding of family violence and perpetrators' behaviour; and Tamariki have re-engaged in school, sports, and other interests, and the barriers to their participation have been removed.	
Risks to children's trust and faith in services to help and support them	Kids' worries about family violence risks are heard, listened to, and acted on by people who understand family violence; Tamariki know and trust that they can come back anytime if they are struggling or need help in the future; Mums are aware of and confident in what Kaiārahi Tamariki are doing with and for their tamariki; The different parts of the helping systems Mums are involved in are working more cohesively together The different parts of helping and justice systems tamariki are involved in communicate more with one another; The negative expectations they had previously formed about helping organisations had been countered; Their experience of KNR promoted their hopefulness about safe futures; Tamariki (and their whānau) know where to get help if they need it and have positive expectations of the outcomes attainable through seeking help.	Although KNR fostered robustly positive service outcome expectations for both tamariki and their Mums, not all services they encounter are equivalently family violence-informed. Repeated negative experiences of services that do not work safely with family violence, or experiences with legal systems that do not keep them safe, can undermine the viability of helping pathways from both kids' and Mums' perspectives and deter future help-seeking.

Changing the frame: Kids, outcomes, and cycles of violence

Our evaluation aimed to answer one question: 'how does KNR provide safety for tamariki who have experienced family violence?' The research question reflects the centricity of the dual specialisms of KNR: safety *for tamariki* from the risks *of family violence*. In this section, we discuss the need for language, framing, and service design to evolve as our understanding of safety for tamariki evolves. We focus on four ways that updating our conceptualisation of family violence and children can foster greater safety potential:

- Privileging safety-related outcomes;
- Matching trauma-informed approaches with family violence-informed approaches;
- Challenging individualistic concepts of 'resilience', and
- Attributing 'intergenerational' cycles of family violence to systemic failure, rather than to whānau.

Children's experiences of family violence typically represent significant (and at times debilitating) emotional burdens. As the observations of and quotes from the children illustrate, they are processing, making sense of, and comprehending their perpetrators' (usually their Dads') violence while in Kōkihi ngā Rito. Engagement with services does not preclude additional experiences of violence. Acts of violence rarely cease upon intervention, and the impacts are rarely limited to individual distress.[112] Many approaches to family violence risk focus on obvious risks, like death or injury, but family violence creates risks in many hidden ways, and these evolve and impact the lives of tamariki. Yet the nature of those burdens, their temporality, and the presupposed 'solutions' to them are variably conceptualised.

As discussed above, targeting 'wellbeing' in children exposed to family violence is often (problematically) believed to ward off later adverse outcomes. Wellbeing and resilience, for tamariki, are not individually built; nor do traditional structures of safety or nurturance aim for them to be individually experienced. Rather, they are established and collectively maintained through safe and healthy relationships, environments, and resourcing. **In the context of family violence, safety is the prerequisite for wellbeing: children's wellbeing is inherently promoted when their lives are safer.**

Family violence services are distinct from other services in their privileging of safety above all other aspirations, and creating safety is the primary and paramount service imperative of Kōkihi ngā Rito. We therefore regard wellbeing as a contiguous benefit of improved safety, rather than an arbitrary set of 'outcomes' defined separately to safety. Accordingly, while countless gains to the wellbeing of KNR tamariki are discernible throughout our evaluation, they are framed through a specialist lens of family violence risk and safety.

The specialist lens of family violence requires 'risk' to be acknowledged as a current and structurally embedded threat, rather than solely as a historical and psychological wound. While trauma-informed practice has (justifiably) gained traction in social services over time, family violence-informed practices remain comparatively underutilised. Yet family violence, rather than trauma and its individual effects, is often the principal mechanism of adversity in victims' lives. **Opportunities to forestall 'adverse outcomes' are therefore contingent on our capacity to identify both 'risk' and 'safety' as being about past, present, and future family violence, rather than unspecified 'trauma'.**

Correspondingly, poor mental health, chronic stress, family violence in adulthood, and social precarity are not naturalised or inevitable outcomes for tamariki exposed to family violence, but are arguably a consequence of inadequate safety and support for victims at the time they need it most: in childhood. Focusing on 'safety from family violence', rather than on the comparatively more popular concepts of 'wellbeing' and resilience', arguably paves better pathways to recovery, restoration, and healing. Such pathways must be structurally bound, rather than individually expected of tamariki clients.

Structural drivers must not be invisibilised within our evolving understanding of how risk and safety are constituted in the lives of tamariki. For many tamariki, experiences of family violence are driven and compounded by colonial violence: an additional multi-layered experience of trauma that is neither contained nor time-bound. From the perspective of traditional knowledge holders, the raising of tamariki is a collective and whānau (including kaupapa whānau, or informal structures of support) responsibility, predicated on interdependency within and between members to operationalise the interests of the group as a whole.[113]

The multi-layered colonial disruption and associated losses, dispossessions, impositions, erosions, and suppressions of beliefs, practices, norms, and sovereignty experienced by Māori throughout the process of colonisation fractured the protective structures, roles, collective practices, and nurturance that traditionally enshrouded the raising of tamariki Māori.[114] Colonial mechanisms – and colonial violence – continue to sabotage the restoration of relationships based on the principles of whanaungatanga. Pihama, Cameron, and Te Nana assert that "the violence we see within our homes and communities is behaviour that has become a part of the contemporary experience of many whānau; however, it does not originate from our tikanga. In fact, it is antithetical to how our tūpuna viewed the role and place of women and children in our society."[115] Colonial violence, as well as and in association with family violence, is not experienced only in the past, but also very much in the present.[116]

Relatedly, our collective understanding of family violence must account for the whakapapa of the social drivers of violence. The assumption that family violence is socially learned and becomes an 'intergenerational cycle' reflects harmful assumptions about how cycles of vulnerability and gendered violence are formed and maintained. Many child victims of family violence do not go on to perpetrate family violence themselves. Accordingly, we do not support the use of the term 'intergenerational family violence', especially when imputed onto children who are victims. The harm caused by widespread gendered inequalities and racist systems traverses multiple generations, as the adverse consequences impact whānau generationally.

These structural drivers of family violence underline why gendered, family violence-specialist, and culturally restorative change initiatives117 are likely to offer greater potential to rewrite the endings of children's stories (and the stories of subsequent generations) than any surface-level 'fix' for a systemically rooted problem. **Ameliorating the spectrum of harms within children's lives requires purposeful, long-term, and safety-oriented support that follows children's lead and works in partnership with their whānau. Addressing the reproduction and 'cyclical' nature of family violence, however, will only be achieved through changing the very fabric of the currently embedded divisions of power, and reversing and restoring the harms of both gendered and colonial violence.**

In sum, we recognise that family violence is ultimately about the (mis)use of personal and structural power. It manifests as a pattern of behaviour whereby perpetrators coerce, control, or abuse their partners, and rely on the sense of authority that their structural advantage gives them to justify this behaviour. Children, targeted or not, become victims. Interventions to combat family violence, reduce its impacts on tamariki, wāhine, and whānau, and prevent future recurrence of it must therefore involve a systems response – with tamariki at the very centre, their Mums and specialist advocates alongside them, and opportunities for safety at each level.

We therefore conclude with a snapshot of the practice ethos for best serving the needs of tamariki impacted by family violence. It comprises 10 principles, derived from the contributions of tamariki, their Mums, and Refuges, and offers a foundation for an enhanced (and shared) framework of understanding about safe and effective family violence advocacy for children.

1. Tamariki are taonga and deserve purposeful, effective advocacy as clients in their own right.
2. Unequal and oppressive systems (especially colonisation, racism, and gender inequality) lay the foundations for family violence, but using violence is still a choice. Perpetrators make the choice to use the power they have over wāhine and tamariki to undermine their safety, autonomy, dignity, and resources.

3. The use of family violence tactics against or around children (or against their Mums or whānau) is a form of child abuse that may severely impact their current and future safety, wellbeing, and life prospects.
4. For every act of violence by a perpetrator, there is also an act of resistance by the safe parent. This may seem like complicity or aggression on the surface, but serves to set boundaries around, cope with, limit, or reduce the severity and impacts of abuse for victims and their children.
5. Mums do everything they are free and able to do to keep their tamariki safe and well, and do not have the power to make perpetrators stop using violence. Whānau are instrumental in helping victims to be safe and helping perpetrators to be accountable.
6. Family violence is often ongoing at the time that we are working with tamariki and their Mums, and our actions can either put them at greater risk or make them safer.
7. The extent to which tamariki are impacted by family violence depends in large part on how we learn about, listen to, and act on risks they and their Mums are facing to create safety from these.
8. Tamariki and wāhine victims are the experts in both their experiences of family violence and in coping with the impacts of family violence. They often know what they need to be able to cope, but do not have access to what they need.
9. Tamariki are safest when they, their Mums, and protective whānau are supported in culturally responsive ways, have their needs met, and know that helping systems will take responsibility for managing perpetrators' violent behaviour.
10. How attuned we are to tamariki and how well we match our advocacy to what is important to them influences how heavy their (and their Mums') mental burdens are and what opportunities they (and their Mums) have to restore their wairua, capacity, wellbeing and happiness.

Ameliorating the spectrum of harms within children's lives requires purposeful, long-term, and safety-oriented support that follows children's lead and works in partnership with their whānau. Addressing the reproduction and 'cyclical' nature of family violence, however, will only be achieved through changing the very fabric of the currently embedded divisions of power, and reversing and restoring the harms of both gendered and colonial violence.

Implications and recommendations

Services and practice

As demonstrated throughout the findings and discussion sections of this report, KNR is an intensive service that effectively improves children's safety both in the immediate and longer-term. It is a service that most child victims in Aotearoa are presently unable to access.

Safety outcomes were achieved through the exclusive, extensive, and extended focus on how perpetrators' use of family violence in the past, present, and future put tamariki at risk. Our evaluation found that identifying, recording, and conveying these risks (and their origin) was the bedrock of all the safety advocacy done with and for tamariki.

KNR is oriented by and responsive to the ever-changing, ever-present picture of family violence risk in the lives of its tamariki clients. Maintaining this risk focus was crucial given the systemic gaps in how other organisations and systems considered the family violence risks to children. KNR worked to partially address some of these gaps (e.g. by drawing on months of risk information captured in KNR children's own words and giving analyses of these to the courts) and to subsequently support tamariki when they faced risks perpetuated by those same systems.

This evaluation outlines many of the core components of a child-centred approach that enable children's full and beneficial engagement – and therefore their safety. At the same time, it highlights the organisational infrastructure needed to enable KT to fully advocate for children: Refuges (and their Managers) relied on the tools and resources collectively developed within the pilot to facilitate service design and delivery that best meets the needs of their tamariki clients.

Organisational service design largely determines how effectively services for children experiencing family violence can meet their needs. Long-term, relational, flexible, open-ended, and, most important, child-led advocacy is resource-intensive, but required to meaningfully meet the needs that bring tamariki to KNR in the first place.

It is imperative that this support be provided within a specialist family violence service context. Correspondingly, it is imperative that KT in particular have the advanced knowledge and expertise in family violence to draw from, and be equipped to partner with and advocate for Mums as part of their advocacy for kids. It was evident from both tamariki and their Mums that truncated, tokenistic, or standardised alternatives shortchange children, precluding longer-term gains to their safety.

The myriad gaps in what other forms of support are available to tamariki reflect long-standing myths about what children need or are able or equipped to take part in. Tamariki, like their Mums, are capable of engaging with specialist support – provided this support is oriented to how they experience them *as children* and what will help them *as children*.

That includes helping those who are most prominent, proximal, and permanent in providing safety and support to them: their Mums. The effectiveness of treating the wound that family violence causes to Mums' personal, practical, and parenting capacity by nurturing their wairua, offering relief and respite from obligation, and building them up as parents has implications for family violence services beyond direct child advocacy. We argue that most Mums, whether their tamariki are engaging with Refuge as primary clients or not, may similarly experience family violence risks to their parenting roles, and may similarly benefit from safety work that restores their capacity – as would their children.

Policy

As signalled above, the designation of capacity and capability (including deploying the right people with the right skills and knowledge) is paramount in shaping what access tamariki have to family violence advocacy. Funding decisions and prioritisation of services for children must therefore be informed by the (otherwise unmet) needs of tamariki and by the prospective gains to safety that services like KNR can offer if made available to children at the right time.

In addition, the findings underscore the ways tamariki are presently let down by the helping and justice systems they become involved in as a result of perpetrators' violence. Police, the child protection system, lawyers for children, the courts, and Judges often do not respond to children in ways that recognise family violence risk, give weight to children's needs and experiences, or make children safer. Yet these actors and organisations have immense power to shape whether children are condemned to living with family violence risk and its consequences, or whether safety and stability can be restored in their lives – as well as shaping whether tamariki learn that adults and systems can and will protect them, or not.

KNR is limited in its potential to change the endings of children's stories of violence when the scripting of these is imposed largely by systems that do not hold Dads accountable for their use of family violence and its impacts on their children. Vulnerability to violence is always imposed – it is never inherent to children. Perpetrators of family violence make tamariki vulnerable. Their vulnerability is often then reinforced and extended by decision-makers who do not see and comprehend the family violence, potential risk, and what is required for children (and, importantly, their Mums) to truly be and feel safer.

Substantive change to patterns of family violence in the lives of tamariki in Aotearoa is unlikely to change until the specialism of family violence is introduced into family and criminal court decision-making. Alternatively (or in the meantime), establishing a mechanism through which the input of professionals best positioned to hear and understand children's experiences and perspectives on both family violence risk and safety is sought and utilised within systems that decide their futures is a vital first step to making children safer.

Research

As implied by the title of this report, our evaluation contributes to the body of knowledge on what builds children's safety from family violence in an Aotearoa context. Research into what tamariki need from support services to both address family violence risk and facilitate recovery is very much still in its infancy; there is minimal evidence to drive the development of sector practices to genuinely meet children's needs.

The nature, role, and efficacy of 'child advocacy' within a family violence service context is often assumed, rather than known. This evaluation therefore provides a starting point for advancing practices for tamariki that are child-centred, family violence-informed, and incorporate a whole-of-whānau approach.

Although showcasing what can be concluded from the data collected from and about tamariki who participated in KNR, our evaluation also highlights significant gaps in research, knowledge, and practice about what tamariki (especially tamariki Māori) and their Mums impacted by violence need, how they are put at risk, what facilitates their safety, and what specific interventions or practices mean for them long-term. The exploration of how and why family violence risk (and unmet need) lead to later adverse outcomes and identifying potential means of disrupting these associations remains an outstanding research gap. Quantifying service capacity for tamariki who have experienced family violence and the implications for their short, medium, and long-term safety would assist the sector and its structures of funding to better target support to where it is most needed – and to those left at greatest risk without it.

The evaluation highlights what can be learned about family violence risk and safety for tamariki through research conducted within the specialism of family violence and advocacy. Without that specialism, insight into what effectively addresses the adversity that is often unseen but insidiously interwoven throughout the fabric of kids' and their Mums' lives would not have been possible. In its place would likely be research reflecting the same harmful assumptions that pervade most researchers' and services' default positioning of children and family violence.

Similarly, children's experiences of participation have dual implications: first, that participating in research can be safe, positive, and beneficial for children when there are adequate safeguards and they are centred within the research design, and second, that interviewers' capacity to engage with them *as children* and *with whānau* about *family violence* was pivotal to how they experienced participation. Our concluding research recommendation is therefore for the evaluation of family violence initiatives to be carried out only by research bodies whose knowledge of and mindset about tamariki, their whānau, and family violence reflect those of the services that are leading advancement of practice for them.

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WOMEN'S REFUGE

Evaluation of Kōkihi ngā Rito

What Kōkihi ngā Rito can teach us about building safety for tamariki who have experienced family violence