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MĀORI AND PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH UNIT

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# Evaluation of the Whānau Ora Wellbeing Service of Te Whakaruruhau

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## Final report

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## **Executive Summary**

Domestic violence and child abuse represent significant threats to whānau ora. Conversely, the weakening or loss of whānau ties can increase the vulnerability of whānau members to domestic violence and child abuse. Thus enhancing whānau ora in the context of domestic violence and child abuse is both a high priority and a significant challenge.

Te Whakaruruhau Māori Women's Refuge has been providing safe housing, support and advocacy to women and children for over two decades and has become a key agency in family violence networks in Kirikiriroa. The development of the Whānau Ora Wellbeing Service, the focus of this evaluation, was a logical extension of Refuge services as Te Whakaruruhau broadened its interventions from an initial focus on safe housing to advocacy within the community, from a focus on crisis to supporting women and children to make a successful transition to violence-free lives in the community, and from advocating for women and children in the context of Crown and other services to advocating for them in the context of whānau, hapū and iwi.

The aim of the Whānau Ora Wellbeing Service is “to strengthen and achieve whānau ora through interventions which empower (whānau) to live their lives free from violence (Te Whakaruruhau, p.4). It is based on an assumption “that whānau empowered are whānau who can manage and reduce crisis while increasing opportunities and pathways to success” (Te Whakaruruhau, 2010, p.3).

The Māori and Psychology Research Unit was commissioned in mid-2011 to conduct this evaluation. It is based on ten case studies of clients in the programme, interviews with Te Whakaruruhau staff and key informants in allied agencies, and participant-observation of Refuge activities.

The case studies provide insights into the lived experience of women dealing with violence, their attempts to protect themselves and their children, and their experiences of – and reflections upon – the Whānau Ora Wellbeing programme. The case studies reveal all the women to have experienced significant physical assaults, threats of assaults, emotional abuse and intimidation. Even though some of the women sustained serious injuries, when they described the impact of the abuse, the women typically highlighted the damage it had done to them emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. The use of alcohol and/or other drugs to self-medicate against the psychic pain of the abuse featured in several case studies. Women also gave accounts of how the violence had affected their children. Often, recognising this impact was an important factor in their decision to seek help.

The loss or weakening of whānau ties was a common theme. Most of the women had grown up with violence and had limited whānau support. However, for even those women who did not grow up with violence, whānau ties had become somewhat weakened as a result of the abuser's isolation tactics.

The Whānau Ora Wellbeing Programme is an individualised, wrap-around programme in that a plan is developed for each woman which addresses her particular needs as she begins to “transition” to life in the community. Plans often included referral to allied services.

Parenting programmes, drug and alcohol programmes, women's empowerment programmes and individual counselling were common components of plans. While such components were generally thought to have been very useful, at the heart of the programme for most of the women was their relationship with their Te Whakaruruhau advocate(s). Women were almost unanimously positive about the advocates whose practical and emotional support was highly valued. A common idea here was that the advocate was someone who would always "be there" for the women.

While the desired outcomes of the programme were somewhat individualised – reflecting the distinctive needs of the individual – there were certain outcomes which featured across a number of the case studies. These included:

- Feeling safe.
- Having obtained suitable housing in the community.
- Being financially independent of the abuser, usually through employment.
- Having successfully addressed drug and/or alcohol abuse.
- Improved physical, psychological and emotional health.
- Feeling more competent and better resourced as a parent.

There was a more diverse set of outcomes in terms of whānau relationships, reflecting diverse situations.

- Three of the women had had their children taken into care by Child Youth and Family. For each of these women, regaining the day-to-day care of their children was a major focus of their programme. All were making substantial progress towards that goal.
- There were a variety of outcomes relating to the relationship to the abuser. In some cases, to all intents and purposes, the relationship had ended. In the majority of the cases, although an intimate, live-in relationship had not resumed, the women felt more comfortable and confident in dealing with the father of their children. Generally these men were having contact with their children and the arrangements were going well. Two of the women had resumed a live-in relationship with the man who had abused them and this was going well.
- Outcomes in respect of other whānau relationships were similarly diverse. For some women, distance or severely dislocated relationships – usually reflecting historical violence – meant that progress in rebuilding relationships was slow. Reconciling with mothers from whom they had become alienated, was sometimes the first step for such women. For other women, however, re-activating and strengthening whānau relationships happened quite quickly.

In addition to the outcomes specific to women and their whānau, the Whānau Ora Wellbeing programme has led to significant systems-level changes.

- It is likely that interagency collaboration, an important factor in effective intervention in domestic violence and child abuse, has been enhanced by the Whānau Ora Wellbeing programme. Te Whakaruruhau has always been strongly committed to working with other agencies but according to key informants, the

detailed, case-specific planning and monitoring associated with the programme has taken collaboration to a new level.

- The impact of closer collaboration is particularly evident in the case of Child Youth and Family. Historically, statutory child protection social work has rarely engaged with perpetrators of violence, whereas the programme has required exactly this in respect of those cases in which the children have been taken into care. Working in close collaboration with Te Whakaruruhau with the ultimate goal of re-uniting the whānau, including the principal abuser, is a major shift in practice and thinking for Child Youth and Family, a shift which has huge potential for enhancing whānau ora.
- Another important collaboration which has been enhanced is with Te Ao Marama, the Māori Focus Unit at Waikeria Prison. While not an “official” or funded part of the programme, it has contributed to the general goals of whānau ora by involving inmates with the work of Refuge through the Prison’s work release programme. By repairing damage to houses, undertaking general duties around the refuge office, and, for some, being supported by Te Whakaruruhau in post-release accommodation, men have been confronted with the reality of domestic violence and have been exposed to a kaupapa of non-violence and respectful gender relationships.

The individual level, whānau level and systems level outcomes described above are very encouraging. We have, however, one caution. The success of the programme relies heavily on the vision and leadership of the senior managers and on the hard work of advocates. In our view, this makes the programme somewhat vulnerable. In particular, we (like the key informants we interviewed) are concerned by the high workload carried by the advocates. Burnout is a real risk.

Our view is that the Whānau Ora Wellbeing programme is an innovative and promising approach to domestic violence and child abuse: indeed, in the context of the broad history of Women’s Refuge, it could fairly be described as revolutionary. It is already achieving significant positive outcomes. The concept is, theoretically, able to be extended. However, any extension needs to be well resourced, involve staff with the specialist knowledge and skills needed for working in the area of domestic violence and child abuse, and to maintain the kaupapa: “te tapu o te wāhine taonga ko te atua o te tamaiti (the sanctity of women and the divinity of children)” (Te Whakaruruhau Incorporated, 2006, p4).



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## **1: Introduction**

As set out in the 2009 Fund Guidelines, the overall goal of Te Ao Auahatanga Hauora Māori (Māori Health Innovation Fund) is “to advance whānau ora by affirming Māori approaches that improve Māori health outcomes” (Ministry of Health, 2009b, p. 4). As we explain below, domestic violence and child abuse pose significant threats to whānau ora: in fact, individuals, couples and children who have become isolated from whānau support are particularly at risk of such violence which, in a vicious cycle, is likely to lead to further dislocation within the whānau. On the other hand, as historical and contemporary accounts suggest, a strong whānau is extremely protective against domestic violence and child abuse.

The Whānau Ora Wellbeing Programme has been developed by Te Whakaruruhau to address the needs of whānau affected by domestic violence and child abuse. In mid 2011, the Māori and Psychology Research Unit at the University of Waikato was contracted to evaluate this innovation.

In the following pages, we briefly review literature relevant to the implementation of a Whānau Ora approach to domestic violence and child abuse and outline the background to the Wellbeing programme. After a brief account of our approach to the evaluation, we present ten case studies. These provide insights into the lived experience of women who seek support from Te Whakaruruhau and their journeys towards health and well-being for themselves and their whānau. In the final section of the report, we draw on those case studies and other information collected in our evaluation to address the key evaluation questions posed by the Ministry of Health.

### **Domestic violence and child abuse as threats to Whānau Ora**

Various reports have highlighted the over-representation of Māori in domestic violence and child abuse statistics, with some commentators referring to an “epidemic” of violence within whānau (Kruger et al., 2004, p.4). Such statistics seem to stand in contrast with what is known about traditional whānau life. As Mason Durie has noted,

There is no historical support for claims that traditional Māori society tolerated violence and abuse towards children and women, or that some members of the group were of lesser value than others. An unsafe household demands a whānau response and, as an immediate priority, an assurance that safety can be provided – elsewhere if not at home. Then, safety guaranteed, the way is clear to embark on a journey which will relieve hurt, restore healthy relationships, and, in the process, strengthen personal and group identities (2001, p.208).

Authors such as Kuni Jenkins and Glenis Philip-Barbara (2002), Stephanie Milroy (1996) and Ani Mikaere (1994) have described the role played by whānau in protecting women and children and in providing a collective response to any violence to a whānau member. For example, Margie Hohepa has noted the wider collective responsibility of whānau towards children and for ensuring their wellbeing (1994, cited in Te Puni Kōkiri, 2008). Citing Rose Pere, Ani Mikaere pointed out that, traditionally, “marriage” did not alter the fact that a woman’s primary relationship was with her

whānau, who held her “in-laws” responsible for her welfare. Thus, an assault against her was regarded as a whānau concern. The perpetrator could pay a high price, including death or banishment (See also Jackson, 1995). Stephanie Milroy (1996) recalls an incident of domestic violence in her whānau’s history. The woman returned to her whānau who approached the husband’s whānau and asked that he be handed over. While that did not happen, they agreed to pay £5,000 compensation and handed over the children of the relationship.

One of the people interviewed by Roma Balzer and her colleagues put it this way.

You never had your marriage by yourself. It was family marrying family. Women were valued: you couldn’t just whack her and get away with it because it was an insult to the whole family (1997, p. 21)

In contrast, colonisation in Aotearoa has seen the “destruction of the whānau” (Mikaere, 1994, p. 133), the importation of punitive methods of child rearing and the undermining of the status of women as a Western ideology of patriarchy was imposed by Pākehā settlers, particularly through the church and the school (Balzer, Haimona, Henare, & Matchitt, 1997; Herangi-Panapa, 1998; Kruger et al., 2004; Milroy, 1996; Wainohu, 1991).

Missionaries and mission schools played a crucial role in re-positioning and re-defining Māori women. In mission schools, Māori girls were taught that the Virgin Mary was the model of womanhood; pious and subservient (Jenkins & Matthews, 1998). Mission schooling focused on training Māori girls in the domestic arts – Pākehā style – in the larger project of “Europeanising” Māori. Such schools were preparing them for running Pākehā-style homes, in which they were to attend to the needs of bread-winning husbands and caring for children in nuclear family households (Jenkins & Matthews, 1998).

Along with such re-education on gender, the schools normalised physical violence in raising children. That is, they introduced corporal punishment as a way of disciplining children, reflecting the doctrine of “He that spareth his rod hateth his son” (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2008, p.15). Inspectors of Native Schools noted the contrast between such over-rigid and harsh punishment exercised in the schools and the traditional means by which children were given guidance (Hohepa, 1994).

Such educational policies went hand in hand with the alienation of land. With the loss of their economic base, whānau often had to break up into nuclear families who migrated into the cities. Economic policies of the post-World War II era exacerbated the problem as large numbers of Māori left their tūrangawaewae, with the consequential loss of the support structures and social control mechanisms the wider whānau had provided (Kruger et al., 2004, 2002; Mikaere, 1994; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1990).

The resulting isolation of women from whānau made them more vulnerable to violence. The Te Rito report captures succinctly the impact of colonisation on whānau:

The privatisation of whānau relations within a nuclear family model effectively removed for the majority of Māori fundamental mechanism of support,

responsibility, obligations and accountability. What happened in a private individual home now became the 'business' only of those who lived within those four walls. The eyes of the whānau were removed, the obligation to our collective wellbeing became increasingly difficult to sustain and as the Pākehā legal system took more and more control, the mechanisms of communal accountability declined (Pihama, Jenkins, & Middleton, 2003, p.24).

Despite these experiences the protective role of whānau has survived colonisation, albeit to a reduced degree. Recent research investigating women's experiences of protection orders included several examples of whānau support making a significant difference to Māori women who were being abused by male partners (Robertson et al., 2007; see case studies Halle and Te Rina). In this context, it is easy to see how a Whānau Ora approach, with its emphasis on strengthening whānau cohesiveness, resilience and nurturance has much to offer in addressing the problem of domestic violence and child abuse.

### **Contemporary Crown responses to domestic violence and child abuse within whānau**

A Whānau Ora approach also offers a potential solution to a problem which has long been evident in institutional responses to domestic violence and child abuse. That is, in many Western societies, interventions have typically been fragmented and focused on individual victims or individual perpetrators. In particular, there has been a strong tendency for women's advocacy and child protection services to work in relative isolation from each other (Murphy, Paton, Gulliver, & Fanslow, 2013a) and for such services to have no or only tenuous links to services working with perpetrators (Robertson, 1999).

Whānau have not been well served by this fragmentation. For example, child protection interventions have been often criticised for failing to acknowledge the huge overlap between child abuse and domestic violence: that is, in the majority of cases of child abuse, the mothers are themselves being abused. Unless child protection workers are alert to this dynamic and appreciate the constraints domestic violence places on women's ability to parent their children, interventions can become punitive towards women, blaming them for a failure to keep their children safe. In the worst cases, intervention can drive women into a forced alliance with the violent father of their children against agencies which threaten to remove children. While emergencies may sometimes necessitate agencies removing children from their mothers, a consensus has emerged in recent years that good child protection practice is to work collaboratively with mothers. All other things being equal, the best strategy for keeping children safe is to help mothers be safe.

Another aspect of the fragmentation problem is the gap between services for perpetrators and services for victims. That is, there is a widespread failure of stopping violence programmes to engage with either women's advocacy services or child protection services. This failure can lead to dangerous and unaccountable programmes. From the other direction, the gap means that women's advocacy services and, in particular, child protection services rarely engage with perpetrators. While this is somewhat understandable in the short term, when separation from the perpetrator may be required to ensure the physical and psychological safety of women and

children, it fails to take into account that many women will reconcile with their partner. Moreover, even if the adults remain living apart, it is highly likely that the father will continue to have some involvement in the children's lives. Hence, from this point of view, it makes sense that interventions with children and women should, where appropriate, also engage with perpetrators.

Hence, because of its holistic nature and engagement with wider Whānau, Whānau Ora offers a potential solution to the fragmentation so frequently apparent among Crown and non-government agencies. As Grennell and Cram have noted,

strategies that are based on strengthening whānau are a relatively new phenomenon in a field that has often taken an individual or couple-based approach to intervening in family violence (2008, p. 1).

## **Te Whakaruruhau and the Wellbeing Service**

Te Whakaruruhau was the first Māori women's Refuge established in Aotearoa. Its stated vision is "te tapu o te wāhine taonga ko te atuātanga o te tamaiti (the sanctity of women and the divinity of children)" (Te Whakaruruhau Incorporated, 2006, p4). For over two decades, it has pursued this vision by providing emergency safe housing and advocacy for women and children (to both those resident in the safe house and those who remain in the community). That is, the services have been largely crisis-focused, prioritising the immediate safety of women and children and helping them access relevant services.

In recent years, Te Whakaruruhau has extended its services to include various programmes aimed to help women re-establish themselves and their children in the community. The Whānau Ora Wellbeing Service, the focus of this evaluation, is a significant addition to the services and programmes provided by Te Whakaruruhau. It fills an important gap: without on-going support, many women will have little option but to return to the situation in which they were abused, with a high likelihood of them and their children experiencing further violence and abuse.

The Whānau Ora Wellbeing Service has its origins in a smaller and more limited programme, the Wellbeing and Transition Programme. The Māori and Psychology Research Unit conducted an evaluation of this programme in 2008 (Robins & Robertson, 2008). As the programme was in its infancy, our evaluation focused on implementation issues, including the development of a programme logic model. Staff and clients identified three foundational values underpinning the service: Whānaungatanga, manaakitanga and wairuatanga. These were seen to be enacted through a range of activities such as providing practical support, advocacy, motivating and challenging women, role-modelling and reconnecting women with their whānau. The outcomes of the service were seen as embracing the short-term (e.g. stability, empowerment, increased confidence and self-esteem, setting goals), the medium term (e.g. employment, training) and the long term (e.g. autonomy, inter-dependence) (see Robins & Robertson (2008, p.19), for the programme logic model).

From this beginning, the Whānau Ora Wellbeing Service has been developed. While the idea of supporting women through transition remains, a distinguishing characteristic of the new Service is the way it actively seeks to engage the wider

whānau, including, where appropriate, male partners of the primary woman client. Engaging men in this way is a revolutionary development in the history of “mainstream” women’s refuges, even if it has a rather longer history in indigenous approaches to domestic violence (e.g. Coker, 2006).

Underlying the Whānau Ora Wellbeing Service is an assumption “that whānau empowered are whānau who can manage and reduce crisis while increasing opportunities and pathways to success” (Te Whakaruruhau, 2010, p.3). The Service aims “to strengthen and achieve whānau ora through interventions which empower them to live their lives free from violence (Te Whakaruruhau, p.4).

Key aims of the Wellbeing Service are:

1. Strengthening and rebuilding whānau relationships.
2. Improving Hauora for children through supporting their parents to create safe and happy homes.
3. Developing strategies and plans that foster violence free homes.
4. Advancing whānau ora and affirm positive Māori approaches that improve Māori health outcomes.
5. Promoting Māori service delivery systems that values health and social service integration and promote whānau centred interventions.
6. Identifying service models that are functional and that appropriately address the needs of whānau, hapū, Iwi and Māori communities.
7. Enhancing physical, spiritual, mental and emotional health, giving whānau control over their own destiny (Te Whakaruruhau, 2010, p.3).

Long term, the desired outcomes for whānau and individual members of whānau are

- Reduced recidivism, (victim and perpetrator).
- Reduction of violence.
- Reduction of intergenerational violence and abuse.
- Increased whānau safety.
- Increased whānau stability.
- Increased whānau sustainability (Te Whakaruruhau, 2010, p.5).

The current evaluation is being undertaken as a part of a three-year contract Te Whakaruruhau has with the Ministry of Health. It’s broad aim is to assess how effective the Wellbeing Service at Te Whakaruruhau is in achieving the vision of Whānau Ora.

## 2: Method

The information on which this report is based has been collected in the following activities:

- i. **Participation in Refuge activities.** Members of the team attended case allocation meetings, accompanied advocates on visits to clients and attended interagency meetings and visited the safe houses. Such participation has helped to build relationships with Refuge staff and to increase our understanding of the every-day reality of Refuge work. It also provided opportunities for informal “Go-along” interviews with staff members. As the term implies, “go-along” interviews are conducted while the researcher goes along with the participant

in her daily work (Carpiano, 2009). The discussion typically develops out of the activities as the interviewer asks questions about what is happening and invites the participant to reflect on her work.

- ii. **Case studies.** Over the period of the evaluation, we recruited ten women who have been interviewed at various times about their experience of the programme and the impact it has had on them and their Whānau. While we had a general plan for these interviews (e.g. whānau relationships, the background to coming into refuge, activities in the programme, evaluative comment about the programme), we steered the interviews with a light touch such that they become more like relaxed conversations. While the interviews were the main source of information, these were supplemented by conversations with advocates and reading case files. Case studies of these women are included in the following section of this report.
- iii. **Interviews with key informants.** We conducted a group interview with senior staff of Te Whakaruruhau, as well as numerous informal discussions over the course of the evaluation. In addition, we interviewed people in allied agencies who had significant involvement with the Wellbeing Programme. As with the case study interviews, we had a general plan for these interviews (e.g. clarifying the participant's role, understanding of the programme, understanding of the concept of whānau ora, strengths and weaknesses of the programme) but the specifics canvassed in each interview varied according to the role of the participant and the context of their involvement.

Our research proposal was reviewed and approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology (Ethics Approval Application #11/30, 23 August, 2011).

### 3: Case Studies

To protect the anonymity of the women, pseudonyms have been used throughout the case studies. Some potentially identifying details (e.g. place names) have been changed in ways in which preserve the essence of the story. Unless stated otherwise, the women featured in our case studies identify as Māori.

#### Case study 1: Melissa

Melissa had been with her partner, Tom, on and off, for 11 years before she came to Refuge with two of their three children. Initially, they lived at the safe house. Later, they moved to the transition house. Prominent in Melissa's story is a theme of growing confidence and independence. Central to the change has been the support of advocates and the safe space – both a physical space and a psychological “space” – that Refuge has provided. These things have enabled her to re-evaluate and renegotiate her relationship with Tom and the wellbeing of their children.

### *The relationship*

Physical violence was part of the relationship with Tom from early on. Perhaps this wasn't surprising: as a child, Tom had witnessed his father beating up his mother.

*He was my first boyfriend – like actual real boyfriend. He did it (assault her) in the first three – no I'd say six months we were together. He hit me and then he apologised, and I went back and then, yeah, it just got – I just didn't think anything was wrong with it.*

The cyclical nature of the abuse made it difficult for Melissa to leave. She described her love for Tom earlier in their relationship, with the good times making it difficult for her to end their relationship. She recalled

*He's convincing all the time. Which is why I always used to go back to him. And then I'll be strong and say 'nah, I don't want it'. So then he'd realise that tactic wasn't working and try to find another way to reel me back in. And yeah, uh, I don't know. I do know, I'm just trying to figure out why I go back.*

Tom's violence escalated during their relationship. Becoming a father made no difference, his violence towards Melissa posing a direct physical threat to the children's wellbeing. Melissa recalled being hit in the head as she attempted to breastfeed one of the children. She also told us:

*I remember one incident when I was holding the baby and he was trying to have an argument with me. I was trying to put the baby down, because I was holding him, and he was trying to hit me, and I was trying to put the baby down and he was still trying to hit me.*

Melissa explained that the abuse affected her on a daily basis as she strove to avoid further abuse.

*I used to walk around on eggshells. I was always, I think it was like a scared thing, frightened. I was always on my toes, never sitting down, making sure everything was perfect – the house was clean, food was cooked, doing those things like a robot. And I thought, yeah he'd just find any little thing to pick at me.*

Despite her efforts, she was unable to meet the unrealistic standards set by Tom.

*I thought I was perfect but then obviously not, because he'd find something else or make something a problem.*

Melissa came to understand Tom's violence in a different way.

*Well, now I can see he was controlling me by saying, just telling me I'm not allowed to go there and do stuff like this, but at the time I just thought he was being caring, you know? "Oh, you shouldn't go over there" – that kind of stuff. But now, when I reflect back on what he used to do to me, or what he has done to me, it's a power and control thing. Except then I didn't know, I just thought "Oh, he cares for me." Not even!*

His persistence also contributed to her difficulty extracting herself from the relationship

*He'll just keep texting me constantly, constantly, saying "No, I love you," to the point where I feel sorry for him, like "Alright then".*

Control over Melissa's financial situation was used as a further tactic of abuse. Tom refused to work and used Melissa's income to fund his substance abuse.

*Because I never had money - that's when their dad used to play up a lot because he used to want this and used to want that – because he had a drug problem with dope. He'll get in so many nutty moods because he can't get stoned, and it was my fault because I had no money. I'd bought the rent and bought the food. And there was no way I was going to sacrifice what little money I had to buy food to give to him to go buy his stuff.*

Because of the financial pressures, Melissa was sometimes faced with hard decisions: feed the children or pay the rent. She got behind in the rent and accumulated other debts.

Tom controlled Melissa in other ways.

*I worked before I had kids. I was working as a waitress for a couple of years and that was cool then, yeah, he stopped that because I was never home. And because I was a waitress he was scared that I was seeing other men – whatever – I was too frightened to even look at another male knowing what he is like. I would never do that but he couldn't trust that I was faithful. He's really insecure.*

Tom's refusal to engage in employment and his unwillingness to let Melissa work compromised her ability to provide for their children. Describing this period of deprivation, she said

*That was really hard. It got to the point where some weeks the girls would be living on eggs and noodles – just something that will stretch...that was rough.*

Tom's controlling behaviour eroded Melissa's confidence in her ability to operate in the world alone. The emotional abuse caused Melissa to feel strongly dependent on Tom.

*When I'm with him, I can't even go to the shop by myself. Wherever I go he's got to follow me and it got to the point where I felt afraid to even go out there myself and go shopping because I was used to him being there all the time... (When she went shopping) he'd wait in the car, he wouldn't go into the supermarket, but just knowing that he's there. Yeah, that was my comfort. But since I've been in Refuge, I've snapped out of that! (laughs) I'm able to go do things for myself.*

Such was Tom's control and Melissa's dependency that he could throw her out of the house knowing that she would come back.



*He used to play up a lot before I came into Refuge, right down to kicking me out knowing I had nowhere to go. I didn't know what to do. Bad enough trying to go the shop by myself let alone finding myself somewhere to stay. So I just used to hang around outside, coz I didn't know what to do. And for maybe an hour or two, then he'll let me go back inside again.*

Melissa's family seemed to be aware that she was struggling to notice changes in her behaviour.

*They had an idea but they didn't really know until a year later because they didn't...they saw me not happy, but to me I thought I was happy, but they'd just seen a change in me. I stopped going out with friends, hanging out with friends. I'd go and see my family but it'd be for only half an hour to an hour and I was gone and they wouldn't see me for a couple of days or maybe a week. And every time they saw me, I started looking down like my light was dimmed. But I didn't think so at the time. But yeah, they could see everything.*

Family members attempted to discuss this change with her but Melissa made light of the situation and her family didn't press the issue.

*Oh they'd try bring it up but I'd be like 'Oh no, nothing's wrong.' But they didn't push the issue. They just left it at that: 'Oh she must be alright'. Like they knew but they just didn't want to make me mad to the point I'd stop going there altogether. So they just took my word for it.*

### **Seeking help**

Melissa entered Refuge following a violent incident for which Tom was arrested. The police asked Melissa whether she would like them to contact the Refuge on her behalf. She said yes because

*I just got sick of being afraid. Yeah. And I didn't think it was fair to the children to be brought up like that, because I was never brought up like that.*

Melissa was surprised by how quickly the Refuge advocates arrived.

*The cops had just left and about ten minutes later I had Refuge banging on my door – at two o'clock in the morning. The police had taken Tom, and they had just left and I was getting another knock on the door and it was them, and I was like "Wow"!*

Melissa and the children moved into the Refuge the following day. The advocates had offered to take them immediately but because Tom was in Police custody overnight, Melissa felt it was safe to wait until morning.

For Melissa, the Refuge has provided emotional support and a safe base from which she can reclaim her place in the world as an independent woman. Prior to one of our interviews, Melissa had been out taking a walk. This is in stark contrast to her description of her sense of dependency on Tom prior to entering the safe house.

*(I) used to hold back before. Like I was afraid to even try and do something. Then I was like just this little circle, and I was in the middle and I thought I couldn't get past it. Now I can step out and do whatever. Just that whole confidence thing.*

In part, “that whole confidence thing” has been enhanced through the experience of living in a communal setting with other women.

*I'm more assertive with other females. Like if they have a problem I'll just ask them straight up, ask them “What's going on? What's the problem?” And I've noticed since doing that, they respect me more. They don't just run all over me or try to push me over. So that's something that's changed in me because before I just let people run all over me because I didn't know what to do or know any better. I've learned to stand up for myself and don't let other people try to make me feel low or take my confidence away from me or talk shit about me.*

Her advocates have played a central role in this.

*They just guided me through that I'm able to do these things, and keep giving me positive things, “You're confident, you're beautiful, you CAN go and do those things, you don't need to ask us to do it when you can do it yourself”.... not like that but nicely. And then I just started to do it and it became a habit and now I don't hardly ask them for anything, I just tell them “I'm going to do this” and they're like, “Oh, okay then”.*

This support has enabled Melissa to become independent in her own time. It was not a one step process but something that evolved over time with her advocate ‘scaffolding’ Melissa as she did more for herself and relied on her advocate less.

*Yeah they will come in and we'll set a time to catch up. Like that. But yeah, I haven't really needed my advocate for ages, I just do it myself, but before I used to use them all the time to take me here, take me there, do this and do that. But not so much anymore.*

This sense of a step-wise progression was evident in Melissa's reflections on moving from the crisis house to the transition house.

*Living down there (in the crisis house) for eight months - it's like surveillance 24/7, the gates. Then I move here and it's nothing. So I felt a bit like, is it even safe here? But then I came to learn it's not a safe house, it's a transitioning house. You're your own person and yeah, it's that whole independence thing. You don't need to be mothered and watched 24/7 like down there, so I've gotten used to it.*

Coming into Refuge also meant that Melissa was supported in accessing relevant services. For example, she completed a parenting programme with Parentline. She received, and continues to receive, one-on-one budgeting help from a church-based advisor. This has helped her clear the debts she accumulated while living with Tom. In

turn, this should help her in her search for suitable accommodation when she leaves the transition house.

Important though these services have been, it seemed to us that in terms of Whānau ora, one of the crucial “interventions” Te Whakaruruhau has provided is a safe space from which to re-negotiate her relationship with Tom and the wellbeing of her children.

On the recommendation of a Housing New Zealand official, Melissa has now obtained a parenting order confirming her role as having the day-to-day care of the two younger children (who “love it” at Refuge). Her eldest daughter lives with Tom. Dealing with Tom as the father of her children means that he is still very much a part of Melissa’s life. Things have changed to the extent that Melissa can now stay at Tom’s place on weekends – in order to spend time with her daughter – knowing that Tom will not be abusive because he knows that she has a choice: she has somewhere else to go. As she puts it, “If I had nowhere to go then he’d still be (acting like) an egg.”

There are still issues of power and control in the relationship. For example, Tom is sometimes uncooperative and obstructive over arrangements with the children, but on the whole, Melissa considers that he is less likely to use overtly controlling tactics because he knows that she will simply return to the Refuge. She thinks Tom has noticed the way in which she is more able to stand up to him. Melissa explained:

*When he argues with me now, I sit there and I listen and if it doesn’t make sense, I can hear what he’s trying to do so I’ll snap him out. He don’t like that so he tries to pull something else. He goes personal. So it affects me but I just make it look like I don’t care. Then when he sees I don’t care it makes him more frustrated. So I just let him think what he thinks and I just walk away. So he’s noticed those sort of things.*

Staying in the Refuge has also given Melissa the space and time to ponder the possibility that her relationship with Tom cannot be fixed, or that she may not want to continue the relationship in the future.

*I suppose some families are meant to have both parents, a mum and a dad, but sometimes it don’t work like that. Like in my situation the dad’s not going to pull his weight to get the family to be together. Like I’ve tried heaps of times. I’m still having baby steps at the moment to try keep him in our family but I don’t trust him yet. Like I’m really still wary. But yeah, some families, you can fix them and there’s others you can’t. If you can have a family with both the mum and the dad and the mum and dad are both going to work together properly then that’s cool. But if the dad’s going to be a dick and not even do anything well then, nah!*

While she is uncertain about the nature of the relationship she will have with Tom in the future, Melissa does have clear goals.

*I just want the girls to be happy. I don’t want no drama or anything with their dad. I don’t want them to see any more trauma in their life. I want to work and have a good job. I don’t want to be on the DPB forever: it sucks! I*

*just want everything to be happy for them. I want them to have everything. I don't want them to have to worry about this and that.*

The encouragement of Refuge staff has extended to helping Melissa consider options for the future. She has started studying project management because

*One of the managers from Refuge had come to me and asked if I'd be interested. She said it's a really good qualification to have. I looked at her and said "Oh nah, I'm not suitable for that". And she said "Yes you are, you've just got to work hard at it and study, and when you understand it, it'll just come naturally".*

Still to be addressed is the practical and crucial problem of finding accommodation when she leaves Refuge. Melissa has found dealing with Housing New Zealand to be "a headache."

*I've sent them heaps of bank statements, my debts, what else are they asking for? Oh they want me to go and look private, and I've told the lady I can't afford to go private, that's the reason I'm going through Housing New Zealand. And she told me they still want me to go private and get a rejection letter and give it to her.*

Moreover, she has discovered that there is two-week window in which to complete an application with all the requisite documentation.

*They kept closing my application because I wasn't handing in what I needed to hand in to them on time ... they just close it and you've got to keep reapplying.*

She has pretty much given up on Housing New Zealand and is "going private" even though she doesn't really know how she can afford the higher rents.

### **Reflections**

Melissa reflected on the way her relationship with the advocates had helped build her confidence. Describing her first days in the safe house, Melissa said

*I never really spoke to the house mum or anyone. I just kept to myself. They'd try to talk to me and see what's happening to me but I wouldn't really talk to them.*

However, she explained that the staff did not give up on her, but continued to support her with gentle persistence, with her interactions with the house mother and advocates constituting the main pathway through which she began to feel safe enough to engage with the world independently.

*That's how I was then, wouldn't open up or say anything. They'd ask how I was and I'd just be like "Oh, I'm good". That's it. They'll ask me questions and I'd give a one word answer so I didn't have to keep talking...I think it was just the talking, yeah, because they didn't give up on me. They just kept talking to me until the point I dropped my guard down and started interacting more with them. Yeah it was just talking.*

Indeed, it is her relationship with advocates which Melissa sees as the crucial part of the Wellbeing programme. They provided her with “scaffolding” while she reacclimatised to life outside of the shadow of abuse. For Melissa, the most important aspect of her time at the Refuge was

*Just their (advocates’) support, telling me that I can go and do these types of things. Like at first, if I had an appointment, they’ll take me. They’d take me to all my appointments. But then after a while they, not telling me, but just making me think for myself, I don’t need to be taken, I can do these things on my own, find my independence. They helped me to find my independence and go and do things.*

The advocates and house mother provided Melissa with an environment that facilitated her healing: they trusted in her ability to nurture her children, provided her with a safe physical environment, and supported her as she mourned the loss of her relationship.

*They’re there to look after you and look after you for your grieving process and your fragile moments and make sure nobody from the outside comes in and tries to find whoever’s in there, like someone’s angry partner might come down. Like a camp mother. Make sure everybody’s safe.*

Refuge staff helped to create a safe space for Melissa in which she could take the time necessary to reconnect with her belief that she was a competent mother and also with her sense of herself.

*I had a lot of time I could actually sit there and have time to think of myself and what’s been going on in my life and looking after my children without having someone looking over my shoulder telling me to do this and do that for them while I’m trying to take care of the kids. Just being a mum and knowing who I am.*

Melissa described her interactions with house staff as uniformly positive, with the only friction related to living with other women in a communal setting.

*I think the challenges I’ve had have just been with other women in the house... just having conflict with other women. But I’ve grown stronger than that. Because before, I was just like, let it happen and didn’t do anything about it. Probably sticking up for myself would be one thing I’ve learnt from living with other women. You have to!*

If Melissa had a criticism of the way the houses were run, it was in what she perceived as some inconsistency in the way the rules were applied.

*When I first moved in I was given the rules and that was okay. They were really strict on the rules. Like if you did anything out of line you got straight exited, and that’s just because of the safety of the other women and ladies down at the safe house. That’s okay. But I noticed after a while the rules started to not be so strict. So say and other woman would have done*

*something to jeopardise the safety of down there and it's alright, they don't get kicked out or nothing. It's quite weird.*

The only other problem that Melissa identified related to the issue of resourcing. A small number of staff support a large number of women with complex practical and emotional needs. The relationship with her advocate is the linchpin of a woman's healing, but the time available for advocates to work with individual women is stretched thin due to the many different roles they fulfil for so many people. Melissa suggested that the service would be improved if the advocates were able to

*...make more time. Like some advocates are really, really, really busy and you need to see them but they can't see you at that time so it's like, oh, but you really want to get it sorted then but they can't come in. That's what I mean by make more time.*

Melissa also described the practical and emotional support offered by Refuge for the next step of her journey, as she transitions into residence outside of the Refuge. She explained that Te Whakaruruhau can provide clothing and household goods for setting up home when she leaves. She also noted that "Even when you move out, they're still there to support you". Indeed, she believes that she will probably need them to remind her that she "Can do things, and to help with the kid's father if he comes over causing a scene." Importantly, she told us that it would be "easy to keep in contact with them...because I'm comfortable with them".

## **Case study 2: Helen**

Helen is of Aboriginal heritage. Her partner, Shaun, is a Pākehā New Zealander. They have two young boys together. As a child, Helen experienced violence within her own family. One result of this was that she was removed from her family by Australian child protection authorities. This was history repeating itself: Helen's mother was a member of the stolen generation.

Helen's story is one of dislocation. Migration has dislocated the somewhat tenuous ties with her family of origin. Shaun, and Helen, have little contact with his family. Primarily because of problems with violence and alcohol, Helen and Shaun lost the custody of their two children to Child Youth and Family (CYF). According to the key informants involved with the family, it would be difficult to envisage a more challenging situation for building whānau ora. However, 18 months of intensive work has seen such change that Helen and Shaun are now resuming responsibility for the children.

### ***The relationship***

When Helen and Shaun got together, neither enjoyed supportive ties with their respective families. As an immigrant, Helen particularly felt the lack of support from her family.

*And the hardest thing for me is, as you guys know, I'm not from New Zealand, but also, I don't have one family member here in New Zealand. All my family is in ...Oz, which makes it a lot harder for me. And that's the*

*disadvantage that I've had right from the start and CYF knew it, I had no family for my kids to go to. I had no, no one here in New Zealand... If I had my family support here in New Zealand, it'd be great, because that would be my emotional side taken care of.*

Shaun does have family nearby but he and Helen have not had much of a relationship with them; in fact, there is considerable animosity between the couple and Shaun's family.

*I had dramas from (Shaun's) family from January 2009. So I mean my brother in law went to Plunket and told them that I was smoking drugs and living with the Mongrel Mob... And it was (him) that rang CYF... and said to CYF that they saw me around at Shaun's house... It was him (who) actually turned up at Shaun's house and actually "Right you've got a choice now: you either stand by this black c.u.n.t or you stand by us your family". And Shaun turned around and said, "Who the hell do you think you are, talking about my wife like that?"*

The only interaction they have had with Shaun's family has been if they initiated it. However, Helen said that she preferred to keep away from Shaun's family because of the animosity between them.

Excessive drinking often led to arguments between Helen and Shaun, which at times also led to physical violence from both parties. Through a mutual agreement, Helen and Shaun decided to live separately. As she put it, "At that time, me and Shaun was caught in that vicious circle: it wasn't going nowhere." Throughout the separation, the children lived with Helen, although they still maintained contact with Shaun and his family. At one stage, the boys also spent time with their (paternal) uncle but he refused to give one of the boys back to Helen. Helen called the police. Subsequently, decided to seek a parenting order for the day to day care of the boys so that she would not have to experience this again.

*I didn't like the fact that my in-laws think that they could swing their weight around and try and be boss of my children when I'm the actual mum. And Shaun didn't really do anything. He stood his ground with his brother so for me there's no option. Yea, so that's why I pulled for full custody.*

A court hearing was held to discuss custody of the children. It was at this time that Helen and Shaun learned that the children were being removed from Helen's care and would be placed in CYF's care.

*And then at the court house, I had about three minutes notice to realise that they were taking my boys. So from 'Yep, sweet, this should be ok, smooth running' – you know, I felt confident. Then I have yeah, five minutes' notice, just prior to walking in the room what was going down.*

Helen and Shaun later found out that the boys were being removed due to concerns from CYF and the Family Safety Team relating to parental neglect, household and personal management, domestic violence, and alcohol abuse.

As Helen sees it, she was given an ultimatum by CYF. If she wanted to have her boys returned to her, she had to sever any relationship she had with Shaun and live in a residence with 24/7 monitoring. After considering her options, Helen went to Te Whakaruruhau.

### *Seeking help*

Helen explained that, from the time the boys were taken she saw herself engaged in the battle of her life to get them back. As she told us, “I’m gonna fight tooth and nail to the day I die for my children.”

Not long after going to Te Whakaruruhau, staff began to work with Helen formulating a plan for her – and Shaun – with the aim of having the children returned to their care. Helen recalled the early conversations with her advocate: “I gave her my side, and she gave it the technical terms.” Helen’s advocate explained to us that including women on the construction of the programme means that they are more invested in it. Through various discussions, a multi-faceted programme was developed encompassing household management, child development and parenting, relationship issues and healthy lifestyles. (See further description below.)

While some aspects of the plan could have been implemented more or less unilaterally, Te Whakaruruhau recognised that to succeed the plan needed the support of key stakeholders. Refuge advocates got in touch with Helen’s family in Australia, who effectively gave Te Whakaruruhau a mandate to help Helen and the children. As Helen told us,

*Yeah, yeah. I’ve got all the support there... And we’ve actually got a letter from my iwi stating that. That they fully support Te Whakaruruhau within their endeavours to – yeah – like help me with the boys and stuff like that... The Refuge has got the support of my mob. Which is one of the big steps, which is good. So it’s not just me with the Refuge: it’s Refuge has got the support of my family. Which is great.*

CYF was a crucially important stakeholder for at least two reasons. CYF social workers were making decisions about the placement of the children, including recommendations to the Family Court. Secondly, several aspects of the programme could be implemented only with the help of specific funding from CYF. Getting their agreement was crucial. Helen recalled her reaction on hearing the news.

*When (her advocate) had told me “Oh it’s all good now, it’s all good bub”, and I’m standing there what? “It’s approved, it’s all good. We’ll roll from here” I just started crying, and my whole body started shaking because I sort of like, sort of like a sigh of relief, you know.*

The programme was intended to create long term safety and stability within the whānau. It was holistic in nature. Based on the Te Whare Tapa Wha, its guiding principles were taha wairua, taha hingengaro, taha Whānau and taha tinana. As mentioned above, at a practical level, it covered four main areas.

*Toku whare.* Here important goals were developing household management skills such as learning to cook within a budget, keeping the whare clean and tidy, budgeting



wisely, developing good routines and time management, learning to maintain the outside yard and increasing self-sufficiency by growing vegetables.

*Te Puawaitanga o te tamaiti.* Here the goal was to gain the parenting skills and knowledge necessary to enable the children to “blossom”. This included knowledge of child development, learning to keep children safe, parenting styles, creative play and child-friendly language.

*Toku hoa rangatira.* The plan called for addressing relationship issues. Beginning with “Ko wai ahau?” this part of the plan considered relating as partners and as parents, the resolution of problems, setting Whānau goals and reflecting on behaviours which needed to change.

*Toku mauiora.* Other health and wellbeing issues were included such as learning about the effects of drugs and alcohol, learning how to handle alcohol in the home, improving self-confidence and self-esteem, developing healthy Whānau activities, learning first aid and undertaking a decolonisation workshop.

These various components were partly implemented through inter-agency referrals. For example, through such referrals, Helen completed an anger management programme, budgeting assistance, addictions counselling, a parenting course and a couples retreat (with Shaun). The children have been referred to a specialist child development service. Alongside these activities, there has been a phased programme of increased contact with the children. Initially, this was limited to twice-weekly supervised contact. Later, the children stayed for (supervised) overnight visits at the safe house. Now, the children are having visits with Helen and Shaun at the house they rent. As Helen said

*We know where it's going to be at, where the children will be coming home. Then there'd still be monitoring and that there, and see how we go and set everything in place so when we do eventually get out in the community. It's not setting us up to fail.*

Progress within the programme has been assessed at regular intervals. This is done by staff, by Helen and Shaun and in a meeting between staff and the couple. In most cases, Helen and Shaun had perceived their progress to be better than the ratings given by Te Whakaruruhau staff. These differences were discussed so that Helen and Shaun understood where and why there may have been differences. These meetings also provided an opportunity to discuss areas of needed improvement, both in terms of what Helen and Shaun can do and what Te Whakaruruhau can do to help support them better. Initially, for Helen and Shaun, receiving lower ratings than they expected was disappointing, but they were also able to see how much change they had made in a short space of time. As Helen told us, “It does look really good at the moment.”

This does not mean that it has all been plain sailing. As Helen told us, she had “stuffed up a few times.”

*You know what I mean? I've slipped a few times, mate, while on this programme, but I have been consequenced for it and I've gone, “Sweet”. We've dealt with it. Hold my head high and soldiered on.*

Overall, Helen is really pleased with progress. For example, she told us about changes in her relationship with Shaun.

*Our relationship is gotten a lot stronger now... He knows what I'm thinking, I know what he's thinking. We don't get angry and negative when we talk about things, like issues now, whereas before, we used to end up getting in an argument, even over the smallest things. Now we just take it in our stride and "Ok, sweet, deal with it".*

She gave as an example the way they dealt with Shaun being made redundant. Within the day, his resume was prepared and being distributed to likely employers. She told us that previously, a challenge like the loss of a job "could have caused a massive uproar, but it didn't. We took it in our stride and didn't get angry about it or anything."

Helen offered this assessment of where she and her Whānau are at.

*I've never heard of a perfect family, one that doesn't argue and you know. But I know where I went wrong. Shaun knows where he went wrong. And we communicate way better now, whereas before we used to get up, get into a physical argument, a physical fight or he'd storm off. Now it's sit there, "Sweet, let's nut this out." And actually come to a solution – whereas there was never solutions before. And the bonus of it all – I think the boys are going to be coming back.*

### **Reflections**

Helen was very positive about the programme. One of things she mentioned often was communication:

*The good thing about it is I've been informed with the progress of CYF and everything else. I've been totally informed all the way, so which is good. There's no decisions and that being made and working in the dark. It's all working together as a team: management, team members and myself and Shaun.*

Open communication has been central to her relationship with advocates. These relationships have helped Helen keep on "track." As she put it,

*If I started to sort of dwindle off a bit, then, (the advocate would say "Helen!" - you know (advocate). And it's good... So we have catch ups every Tuesday after visits with the boys, just to see how things are, how the visit went.*

Helen is grateful for the support she has received from Te Whakaruruhau and the fact that they are all working towards the same goal.

*I got to hand it to the staff, they've kept their head clear through all of this and it's been test and trials with everyone, but we all see the picture, and that's the good thing about it, we're all on the same wave length. That's where you need to be.*

She likes it that programme works with Shaun too.

*Yeah, I found that as a good thing. It was awesome, because it wasn't isolating one parent out.*

Helen offered this overall appraisal.

*Te Whakaruruhau is awesome, it's awesome. Cause yeah, like I said I wouldn't have got this far (without them). And the structure of the programme and what we had done and with everyone on board and that, that was quite amazing for me... But yeah, definitely with the programme and the staff here, it's – yeah - it's changed my way of thinking, compared to where I was to where I am now is totally different, totally different.*

Helen's positive appraisal is confirmed by one of the social workers who has been involved in her case.

*She's proud of how clean and tidy her house is and how it smells of lavender and disinfectant... She's planted a veggie garden and she's growing tomatoes and goodness knows what. That's a very different person to the person who had... boxes of empties all at the back door and no food in the cupboard in the house, so I mean - Is that about Whānau Ora? Is that about the health and wellbeing of family? I think that it is.*

### **Case study 3: Katz**

Katz is a single Pakeha woman in her mid-forties. She has four children, three sons to her former partner Nigel, and a daughter, Millie, born after she had separated from Nigel. Like other women in our case study, Katz's story involves violence in her family of origin as well as in her relationship with Nigel. Unlike most of the other women, Katz now faces violence from her sons. Having sought help from Te Whakaruruhau over a decade ago in relation to Nigel's violence, Katz is now getting support in relation to the abuse from her sons. Dealing with her sons is not made easier by the complicity of their father and the fact that Katz has significant health problems, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. However, she has not had to enter a safe house: instead she is part of the "community" caseload, getting support in her efforts to establish a safe home for herself, Millie and her pets.

From a very young age Katz witnessed her father abusing her mother.

*There was a shotgun put to my mother's head or a knife to her throat or stuff like that. Or she was tied to a bed and raped.*

Given the huge overlap between domestic violence and child abuse, it is hardly surprising that Katz also became a victim at the hands of her father. She described feeling let down by her mother during this time,

*My mum knew a lot of the stuff and never did anything. She also was a part of my abuse growing up.....I have been around stuff that is unbelievable and back then there was no such thing as child abuse or domestic abuse, you know, umm the police would turn up and go "It's a domestic" and walk away.*

Nigel too, came from a family where violence was common place. A “grandfather beat their grandmother until she had kidney failure. Beat her when she was 7 months pregnant and she lost the baby.”

### *The relationship(s)*

Nigel was abusive towards Katz while they were a couple. Katz had Nigel arrested and “locked up” many times for his abuse. Nigel’s “gang-related” family were unsupportive, believing Katz should have put up with the abuse rather than bringing the police into private family business. The couples’ children sometimes witnessed Nigel abusing Katz. As the relationship with her ex-partner began to break down Katz contacted Te Whakaruruhau for help. This was the first time she was cared for by the Refuge, roughly a decade ago.

Katz also sought help from CYF. Suffering from post natal depression and feeling unable to cope with four children under the age of six, she asked for the children to be taken into temporary care while she recovered. When she felt better able to cope, she sought the return of her children. Initially, they refused to hand the children back. In Katz’s words, this was the beginning of a “horrible battle” that went on “for years.”

*They (CYF) didn’t care. They were out to stop me winning the battle. That’s all it meant to them, it was about me and them. Not about the safety of the kids, because there has never been a risk factor with me and the children.*

The children went through multiple placements before they were returned to her care. One son went through 29 placements. Katz explained how she felt about that,

*I don’t know how they say that is not child abuse. He was abused while in care a few times and back then there wasn’t much done about it.... They (sons) could have come back home when I was well, it could have worked out.*

Once the children were returned to her, Katz received an apology from CYF. CYF acknowledged the children should have been returned to Katz sooner than they were.

*I got an apology from two people quite high up in the system..... But they never came and apologized to my children; now they blame me, the kids blame me.... why come and say sorry to me and not say sorry to them? Then that may change my relationship with them. That would change a lot in our lives, you know? .....My kids need someone to blame and they won’t blame their father because they are too scared of him..... So I have spent years trying to restore their lives, but the damage has been done with them.*

Katz believes her sons have become resentful towards her as a result of the time they spent in CYF care. She felt their anger towards her was perhaps misdirected because she did her best for them.

*He (Nigel) donated the sperm, but I’m the one who fed you, who looked after you, I was the one who was solid. Even when you weren’t there I was*

*the one who fought. He did nothing once for you guys (sons), but I did. I never stopped., I nearly made myself sick doing it*

Nigel and his family did nothing to help Katz get the children back into her care. Despite this, the couples' sons do not seem to blame their father in the same way they do Katz for the time they spent in CYF care.

### *Seeking help*

We cannot say definitively that being taken into care and having multiple placements exacerbated the boys' behaviour problems. What is clear is that as they grew older, they became verbally and physically aggressive, towards Katz. They would

*...smash the door, punch holes in the wall, stand over me, threaten me and put a fist to my face.....pull a knife on me, pull scissors on me, tell me to sleep with one eye open.*

Living in a constant state of fear and tension Katz kept "my doors locked because I was afraid of them." The abuse from her sons triggered symptoms of the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This made it difficult for her to carry out her normal everyday activities. As Katz put it,

*The mind crapping stuff, the mental abuse, that has been the hardest thing to get over, the bruises heal but the mental stuff. You lose who you are.*

The unpredictability of her sons' behaviours caused Katz to become increasingly worried for the safety of her daughter – and herself. Katz saw the fear in her young daughter's eyes when a visiting friend mentioned how frightened Millie seemed during an episode of intimidating verbal and symbolic aggression from James, her teenage son. After that incident and because of the escalation of violence and aggression in the family home Katz decided protecting her daughter from the harms of abuse was a priority for her. She explained,

*What I'm doing is tough love, what I'm doing is saying "I'm not going to let you (sons) hurt me. I'm not going to be afraid of you and if you can't respect me in this home then I will see you outside the gate."*

She was aware, from her own childhood, of the damage witnessing abuse can do. James "Just won't leave and he is really intimidating. It was terrible." With the help of her case worker, she obtained a protection order prohibiting James from entering the home. Katz was upset "[It] was really sad and really hard to do... [but] I felt there was no other choice." However, the order provided little protection for Katz.

*(Orders) are a waste of a piece of paper....(James) smashed the front door in and stood over me with a fist raised. I ran through the house and I was traumatized, I have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and I was traumatized. Then it went from worse to worse to worse after that and I would call the police... and they wouldn't turn up and I ended up in hospital.*

James breached that protection order twice. As a result, Katz went through the court system to enforce the protection order. Her Refugee worker has provided support by

accompanying Katz when she is required to testify in court and by going through the processes with her.

*My son is really angry. He didn't want me to go to court and he didn't want me to testify against him. But I said to him "One; you breached it, and two; when are you going to own something? You know, you have been playing the system with this GBH thing thinking you are going to get off and nothing seems to worry you."*

The evening before a court case, her younger son Michael was arrested for attacking another boy. Katz felt helpless to deal with the situation.

*It was scary and intimidating so I had to send my daughter away. Then my Refuge worker and me ended up going to see the head of the Family Safety Team up at the police station and he ended up putting an alert out on them.*

She felt those agencies (Police and CYF) who should be best equipped to help her, do not understand or know how to best support parents who are abused by their children. She explained,

*You're a single mother with three teenage sons and all of them scare the crap out of you....the thing is with teenagers in this country is it is really hard for the police or us to get anything done with them when they start losing control. Now you have to fill out a frickin form just to go through there (CYF). You have to get put on a waiting list, they have changed it. You don't have the power any more, you don't have the power as a parent to go in and say "I need your help. Can you please help me?"*

Recently, Katz has had multiple dealings with the police and the courts over her sons' behaviour. She expects her sons to take responsibility for their actions.

*I won't go to any court case, when they do aggravated robbery or they choose to do things that hurt other peoples' lives, I just turn my back on them.....I can't support that and I love them enough to say, "I'm not doing this with you". That's what the police really like, because I'm standing against their behaviours. The police said to me, "Do you want your son to go to prison?" I said; "Well yes, if that is what needs to happen, but I would prefer him to acknowledge that he has these issues and do some changing because we all make choices."*

The other sons have behaved in a similar manner: one has been sent to "lock down" for violent crimes and the other, "who wants to follow in their footsteps", is currently in care.

*One son's abuse was psychological, he didn't actually hit me, but it was all mental abuse and intimidation. Fear! Him having control over me because I was afraid of him, he wouldn't respect anything I say. If I was to say to him look I'm not feeling safe, you need to go! He would say, "Well what the fuck are you going to do about it?" And stand over me.*

At times, the sons' father, Nigel, and his family became involved with the boys. Rather than try to help change the boys' bad behaviour they seem to encourage it.

*They are proud of that and they don't care about what happens to them (her sons). When my son kicked the kid's head in at the camp and got locked up for the weekend, his father, when he got out on the Monday, went up and gave him a pat on the back and said, "I'm proud of you son, you are a man now. Here's a bag of pot and here's the tv (television)".*

Katz is worried for her "boys" and it caused her a great deal of pain when she felt she had no other choice but to let them face the consequences of their behaviours.

*When my kids make me mad I have the choice to beat them or to discipline them. I have that choice. Even if I'm angry, I have got the choice of how I treat them. But the one thing about my parenting is I like the kids to learn from what they do. Bailing them out doesn't teach them that. Respect is never given to you on a platter. You have to earn it.*

Life experience and learning how to parent have contributed to the decisions Katz has made over how she disciplines her sons.

*I had to learn how to be a mother, because I wasn't raised very well....My journey over the years of my life, I've lived a lot in my life.....Every time I have learned something from it, so I have a lot of skills... and my case worker likes how insightful I can be and I'm not afraid to be truthful about what I do..... But I'm not strong enough to do it on my own, all the time.*

Te Whakaruruhau and her case worker provide the support for Katz which enables her to remain in her home and keep it a safe space for her daughter.

*Because when it is your ex- partner you can walk away and forget them. But when it is your children, you are torn between the love and the fear. Part of me feels relief when they are not around, the boys, because I can have peace..... Look I can't praise Women's Refuge enough. I can't tell you how much they have meant to me and the support they have given to me over these last couple of years.....You know they can't do much more than that. If I was totally not safe they would put me in a Women's Refuge. But I refuse to run away and my animals are just as important to me as my children are.*

There are times when Katz struggles to keep moving forward. It is at these times that her case worker proves invaluable,

*At the moment it's like, it's you can get really weighted down emotionally. It's like when I'm crushed emotionally it takes me days to get back on my feet. I can't do that on my own and I just feel supported.*

Katz described feeling let down by a system (excluding Refuge) she thought should have done more to help her. In particular, she feels CYF played a part in creating the problems she now faces with her sons. If CYF had allowed her children back into her

care, Katz believes some of the problems she now faces with her sons' behaviour may not have occurred. In addition, Katz is contending with an ex-partner and his family who appear to condone and even encourage the violent behaviour her sons sometimes engage in.

*The thing is that his father and his family are gang associated. Now I'm totally against that. When it came to them (Katz sons) and their behaviours I was battling against that and what they believe. Their father is extremely violent.....unfortunately that is what they connect to. If I didn't make a stand against these boys they are going to be just the same as their father.*

Because of the abuse in her family of origin, Katz chose to have little contact with them over the years. This decision was made as a form of protection for herself and her children. As Katz explained,

*My eldest daughter was raped by my brother when she was 4 or 5. That's why I have a little bit to do with my mum. But I am the rock of my family because I chose that I was not going to hurt my children. There are a lot of sex offenders in my family.*

However, in recent years there has been some reconciliation with her mother.

*This year, I received a letter from her and it was that she was sorry. It meant everything to me and it changed our whole relationship. Because she took responsibility, she took ownership of what she did. I've always done that with my kids, I've owned what I didn't do right, but I won't own what's not my responsibility. It just made a huge difference in my life.*

Katz feels no-one else in her family will take responsibility for the abuse and the rebuilding of her relationship with her mother is a slow process.

*(My mother) lives in a nearby town and we might see each other a couple of times a year, but we keep in touch. She is more supportive, but I don't talk about my life with her of course. That's fine because it is time to move forward. It's so important, the problem with abuse, you know, domestic violence, child abuse, stuff like that they (agencies) go through the family and look to the family for support, but if you look back at the family situations, that abuse started back then. It's really important to break the cycles, with this stuff and the hard thing is there is still finger pointing with no responsibility.*

Similarly, Katz feels that both Nigel, and his family, are complicit in the violence she has experienced. Nigel appears not to appreciate the extent or impact of their sons' abusive behaviour. This may be because the boys are afraid of Nigel and do not try to intimidate him. Moreover, Nigel appears to model to them disrespectful and intimidating behaviour. For example, Katz described what happened when she and Nigel participated in a meeting with the parents of a boy who was physically attacked by one of their sons.



*I said to the parents of this boy..... I looked across the table and I said to her, "I just want to say that I am so sorry that my son did that to your boy". She said, "Well it is not your fault" and I said, "I know that, but I'm telling you from one mother to another that I am so sorry, I am so ashamed of his behaviour that is just not ok".... my sons' father was sitting there with my son and he was laughing at me. I ended up walking out, but the facilitator said to my ex, "Well what have you got to say?" And he said, "Well I find it very amusing actually, I find her (Katz) amusing". I stood up and said, "I'm not staying for this, I'm not staying for this". When I left I just broke down in tears, I had only just come out of hospital. I couldn't believe his maturity was so dense and so dumb, stupid..... I thought you are nearly 50 years old and you think it is ok to hurt another. I mean I just cannot deal with his mentality at all. It's just bullshit. I mean who laughs at someone else getting hurt? Only someone as fucked in the head as he is. I don't care if I'm hated, but he has the kids live in fear and they may not do any of this shit to him, because they are too scared to.*

This sort of behaviour makes it near on impossible for Katz to consider building any kind of family support network with Nigel. On the other hand, Katz has created family-like relationships with some of her friends. She described a male friend who has become an important part of her support system.

*My best friend, we go back nearly 30 years and he stepped up as a father figure. He's been like a dad to her (Millie) and we were talking yesterday, because he is very supportive of me when we have behaviour issues with her. A lot of these boys aren't being raised with a man in their life and even girls like my daughter. Her relationship with men in the future will be balanced by what she knows as a child and she has seen what I have had to do with the boys. But my male friend he has given her the love that she needs from a father's perspective. So when she grows up she is not going to do what I did and get into bad relationships because that's all I knew.*

For Millie, her mother's male friend is not a member of a biological whānau. Moreover, men in such relationships have often been identified as posing a risk to children (D'Alesso & Stolzenberg, 2012). At the same time, it may well be that men in this sort of situation can potentially play a useful role in establishing an alternative sense of whānau and contribute positively to the well-being of children exposed to domestic violence. Katz certainly thinks so.

Pets are also important to Katz and she described them too as "family". Having the support from her case worker allows Katz to stay in her home with her pet "family." She gets a great deal of satisfaction from caring for her animals and believes Millie is learning by example how to nurture and care for others as a result.

### **Reflections**

Katz speaks very highly of the help she has received from Te Whakaruruhau. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and various serious health conditions leave Katz feeling vulnerable and sometimes unable to cope with everyday living. It is at these times she is able to call on her case worker for emotional support,

*They are just a major support. Look when you feel... I feel blessed with having such a good case worker and I know that at any time, the worst times I've ever been in, she's been there. I can cope with the little things and at the moment I feel really good because I can open up my house.*

It is difficult for Katz to walk over any distance and she receives help getting to and from medical appointments.

*Because my health is really poor, they (Refuge) take me to my appointments. It's like a part of me coping with my life.*

Te Whakaruruhau helped Katz with clothing for Millie and herself, and furniture for their home.

Katz finds it is easier to keep her home a violence-free space because of the support her case worker and Te Whakaruruhau provide. The case worker helps to create an environment where Katz feels she has the strength to stand up to her sons and make the changes she believes are important to break the cycle of abuse for Millie's future.

*My case worker would just come over and say, "We are going for a drive", and she would just listen to me. We went to the police, when it has been really scary they (Refuge) would turn up whatever hour of the night.*

Such support from her case worker helps Katz to maintain self-belief that she is doing the right thing for her sons. The support helps to counter the messages she gets from Nigel's family who condone his violence and blame her for her role in holding him to account.

*His family hates me for locking him up. (According to them) I should have handled it. I just think that I'm working against a family, not just my boys. I just believe that one day this going to get better and I believe that I am doing the right thing. Through the hard times I keep telling myself that and then when I don't believe it I get affirmation from my case worker. She gives me.... She just affirms that I'm doing ok.*

However, without the support of other agencies over the years, Katz has found it difficult to cope with her sons' negative behaviour and more recently, violence.

*I just felt that I was abused by my children for a long time.....The mental abuse is the worst and I think this country needs to change its laws on youth and get things done earlier rather than later. Stop these things happening. They need to support the parent.*

Protecting Millie is foremost in Katz mind; nonetheless she is just as concerned over creating an environment where her sons can develop healthy lifestyles and relationships.

*That is the top priority, safety and security, but I want better for them. I want them to be good men, to be good fathers, to be good providers, to be good everything. I don't want them to destroy their life and everybody else's lives.... You want to change your kids' lives, you are not just doing*

*this because you want peace and safety and security.... This is what happens when you learn from life experience. Everyone screws up, everybody does it wrong, but it's what you learn from your life.*

Katz's story vividly illustrates some the challenges of building whānau ora in the context of domestic violence. Domestic violence and child abuse were evident in both her family and Nigel's family. Although Katz's relationship with her mother has been repaired somewhat, neither Nigel nor his family appear to be providing a positive environment for the children. To all intents and purposes, it is Katz who is making a stand for whānau ora. As she told us, "it is breaking the cycle and that's what I'm wanting to do." However, she was also quick to acknowledge the crucial role Te Whakaruruhau plays in this:

*Refuge has been my strength. I just couldn't cope with everything on my own. I just needed that emotional help to get through.*

#### **Case Study 4: Ataahua**

Ataahua had been with her partner, Ron, for well over 20 years before she came to the Refuge with her three children. They lived at the safe house for little over a month before they moved back out into the community. A common theme throughout Ataahua's story is that of a strong will to be independent, confidence, and love for her children. Ron is still part of her life: Ataahua thinks this is important for their children.

##### ***The relationship***

Physical violence was a feature of Ataahua's relationship with Ron from early on. Here, Ataahua seemed to be repeating the experience of her mother.

*I saw my mum get beaten, so I more or less fell into it. The abusive relationship thing.*

Ron was part of a gang, and as Ataahua pointed out, women had a low rank in the gang hierarchy. In this context, the wider group set the standard of how women should be treated. Ataahua struggled to reminisce about this part of her life when resisting was almost impossible.

*There was a real bad thing happening out our place. People were saying it was like a cult sort of thing. I'm trying to put it towards you that there was a lot of violence then between me and my partner. But it was that cult thing happening around. Men were pretty high up in this cult sort of thing we were in, you couldn't confront any of them. And if you did, it would be like another hitting altogether. But not just by the one person, it would be a whole heap of people you know, everybody would be on the attack.*

When asked to describe some of the violence that she lived through, Ataahua recalled an incident in which she "gave a dog roll to a cousin".

*He (Ron) didn't like that and stabbed me in the leg. Um, I've been stabbed twice, shot in the head with a slug gun once. I've been wacked over the head with a couple of boards. Um I've been thrown onto couches....*

Not that Ron's violence was always a response to some presumed offence. Ataahua noted that he was easily influenced by other people, and would do things to her if he was provoked.

*There was this one time that someone really did not like me being with him. And while I was asleep, something must have happened in the party. All I remember is waking up and seeing her standing beside the door with him, and her saying "Just kill her, just kill her". I didn't realise what had happened until the next morning. I was on my stomach and I couldn't move. I eventually got up and went straight to the mirror. When I turned around to see what was on my back, there were heaps of little holes. Probably made by a knife.*

Ataahua's family could see when the abuse was happening, but majority of them did not see it as being severe enough to justify her leaving Ron. A cyclical pattern ensued.

*My sisters just thought, "Come round home and you can have a rest, and then you can go back when you're ready". There's been stages, it was have the domestic, stay with my family and then go back and stay there and have the domestic again.*

Only one family member felt that she needed to get out of the abusive relationship.

*She always wanted me to get out; she told me that I needed to break the cycle.*

### **Seeking help**

Despite all the violence that Ataahua endured, it was realising the effect that the violence was having on her three daughters that was the impetus for change.

*The violence had a mean impact on my girls. I fell into the violence from watching my own mum get beaten and I can see it happening with my babies.*

Ataahua has twice separated from Ron. The first time, she returned quite quickly.

*I just went to the Refuge and I stayed there but I wasn't as comfortable as I was. It was during the Christmas period. I had lost an aunty. And, yeah... it just wasn't happening for me and I went home – I went back.*

The second time Ataahua decided to leave her partner, she not only went to Refuge, she also laid a complaint with the Police and applied to the Family Court for a protection order and a parenting order. Again, the impetus was seeing what was happening to her children.

*Well, it was my girl. My oldest girl. I don't know what the frick her dad did to her when she was in the room. But when she came out, you could just see. You could usually growl her and she would scream and yell back. But I don't know what the father did to her but she came running out and this time it was like.....I'd just had enough. I told him that she was going to end*

*up in an abusive relationship because of what he does to her. He hits her. And she's going to end up with a man that hits her.*

Ataahua told her partner that night, that first thing in the morning her and the kids were leaving. Ron thought that Ataahua was leaving to stay with her sister but Ataahua planned on doing more than just that.

*The next morning I got up, waited for my oldest to get on the bus so I knew she had left the house, and then I left. I took my two other girls and left. I went to the Police station and called my sister from there.*

Her sister accompanied Ataahua to the Police station, and from there to Te Whakaruruhau.

*We spent half a day at the Police station and half a day at the initial Refuge house. Most of it was filling out paperwork and my kids were irritated. There was only so much you could give them to do, they were hoha and hungry. How much water can you drink in a day? At least someone at the Police station gave them a Milo.*

Hungry, tired and exhausted, it had been a huge day for Ataahua and her daughters. When asked about how the Refuge went about providing support for her and her daughters, Ataahua replied:

*Mainly just being there. With the safe environment in a safe house. Seeing you and offering stuff for the kids because you come with absolutely nothing except the clothes on your back. So when you get there, they offer you a welcome pack. My kids needed nappies, my kids needed this and that. Having other ladies around that had been in a similar situation helped, talking to the other ladies. The Refuge was really helpful, to me and my girls.*

Ataahua explained that when women arrive at the Refuge, they get assigned an advocate to take care of any immediate concerns.

*The advocate will do everything. You don't even need to walk out the door. She will go to WINZ, any government places and she will do all the talking for you.*

This was just the kind of support Ataahua needed, as the initial stage of moving in to the Refuge made Ataahua feel drained.

*The first stages of moving there, I didn't want to go anywhere, I just wanted to stay there and sleep.*

It wasn't before long that Ataahua felt that she was ready to transition back into the community. Ataahua had always been clear on what she wanted to achieve from the moment she entered the Refuge.

*My first goal was to get the protection order and the parenting order done. My second mish (mission) was to get my kids into schooling. I had done that. And my third mish was to find me a house, and well, I've done that.*

While Ataahua achieved these “missions” financially things were tight. When we last spoke to her, she had her brother in law living with her. Ron too was back in her life “in and out”.

*I wanted him to come back because he is the only one that can help me look after the kids. Other than him, well I don't have any support anywhere else. I got him back so that he could give me some time out, and he looks after the kids. But I want him to get his own place; I don't want him to have the kids here. I want him to stay in the kid's lives but I want him to get his own place.*

Ron is currently undertaking a stopping violence programme.

*I had explained to him that I had been with him for 27 years. He is the father to my kids and I haven't seen any other life. I wanted him to get some help with his anger, me to get some help, which isn't happening...Then I wanted both of us to do counselling together so we can focus on each other. Because the breakup is not with us and our kids, it's me and him.*

Their oldest daughter has completed a programme for children exposed to domestic violence. Ataahua thinks it has made a difference: “Yes – she loves it anyway.” For her part, Ataahua has accessed advice on parenting which has helped her better understand the impact of the family dynamics surrounding her while she was growing up. She wants to change this for her own family.

*All of our thing has been yelling. Our whole family is loud. We all yell. Everything we do is a kind of yelling conversation. So I needed that parental guidance help. For me it was finding a new way of toning down. I always thought that sitting on the naughty seat was like stupid, but it works! Instead of yelling, my babies need a bit of guidance too.*

Other things have helped too. Ataahua has taken part in box-fit classes. These and other techniques have enabled her to release some of the stress and pain that she has been holding in.

*I just talk about it more, breathe. Keep your head up and don't fall into the stressful thing. Ya know if somebody is pounding at you, if somebody is going at you, I learnt to just breathe. Using breathing techniques and just try to wipe it out of my head.*

### **Reflections**

Ataahua and her children have come a long way from the day that Ataahua packed them up and left the house, through to the transition of living in their own home in the community. When asked about the experience of coming through the Refuge, and how it has impacted there overall wellbeing Ataahua replied:

*Physically, we feel a bit, you know, light on our feet. Especially since we've been getting out instead of waiting around for somebody to pick us up. We are stress-free. Emotionally, my kids are happier.*

Some of this is undoubtedly attributable to the help she has received from Refuge. Initially, being given clothing, furniture and household effects was important.

*As soon as I got there they had a big as shed and they just said "You just go through and have a look, you take whatever you need for you and your children."*

When Ataahua moved into her new place, a staff member

*... came over and asked if she could come into the house. She came in to see what we had, so she knew what to bring. That lady really deserves some recommendation.*

Ataahua valued the support she got from other Refuge residents. In fact, when asked what were the best parts of the Refuge she replied.

*The other ladies, they were massive. Making friends with the other ladies and having conversations with the advocates. Seeing what they do and how they do it.*

Ataahua was less positive about her advocate, who, in Ataahua's view, tended to play favourites.

*There were a number of times that I wasn't allowed to do things, but I don't think it was the case for all. She had this attitude where she picked and chose who she liked. She let us know that. "I like who I like". You know if you're going to do something like this (i.e. be an advocate) you do it from the heart – otherwise you don't do it at all.*

When asked if her advocate did a good job at providing support Ataahua replied:

*I would say yes, sometimes. Mind you she never did visit much, only when she needed something to be done.*

Ataahua seems to have noticed something which we also noticed: advocates are extremely busy. In Ataahua's words

*They've got enough to do, dealing with all the other women. I'm sure we're not that hopeless where we can't do anything at all. I thought to myself, if I can, I will lessen the load for you.*

Hence Ataahua feels that much of what she has achieved has been a result of her taking the initiative and being independent. However, despite having some reservations about her advocate, Ataahua "recommends" the Whānau Ora Wellbeing service.

*I reckon (they) are doing a good job. They need to be recommended. I don't know, I don't know what (me saying this) is going to do but, they need to*

*be recommended... because they help look after a lot of strangers, a lot of strange women... and different situations.*

### **Case study 5: Rangimarie**

Like many of the women we interviewed, Rangimarie grew up with violence and alcohol abuse. She described it as a *Once Were Warriors* scenario.

*Our whole family's grown up in it (violence. We grew up with that...dad doing it to mum all the time...yeah...nan, nan and pop...all living at mum and dad's and all getting the hiding. That's why I can relate to the "Once were Warriors" movie because we grew up like that...being pregnant...kids and mum getting a hiding...and dad's friends around.... dad had a bar at the back and it was like that all the time...crates of beer and music and that...that's how we grew up.*

To this day, many of Rangimarie's Whānau experience problems with alcohol and she herself continues to work on her own issues with alcohol

*We all got alcohol issues, all of us. Yeah, because we grew up with it.*

#### ***The relationship(s)***

Rangimarie has had two significant relationships. Both have been violent.

She left her first husband, James, with whom she had a son, after many years of violence. Her family would generally collude with James, often making her feel guilty for the beatings. One time the police took her to Refuge but her family found out and took her back, saying things like 'Why do you need them? You don't need to be there, you have us'. She regrets the interference from her family and still expresses some anger about it. For many more years she was to endure more beatings and have her son exposed to that life.

She got together with her current boyfriend, Tem, just over two years ago. He is serving a two and a half year prison sentence for an assault against her.

At first, Tem seemed to be a kind and caring person. This changed about a year into the relationship, when he began using Methamphetamine. During parties, Tem would often become agitated and violent. He began beating her up and even the intervention of his brothers and neighbours could not curb his violence. Rangimarie described the escalating violence.

*First it was pushing. Then he started whacking me...throwing me around and stuff...Yeh...split my head here.*

In a space of a year they were evicted from five houses – with Rangimarie being left with the debts. The police were involved on numerous occasions. They would typically suggest that she go into Refuge but Rangimarie didn't, in part, because of the pressure she faced from both her family and Tem's family.



### Seeking help

Eventually Tem was arrested and Rangimarie did go into Refuge. She had had enough of the moving, the violence and being blamed by the people around her.

*Because we'd been to five houses I think we'd moved from...in and out, in and out...and he loses the plot and then we get kicked out...and just so many times, moving and moving, and I just had enough of it...we'd been to his mother's and he'd do it there...throwing me around and stuff...and then people get involved and I hated that...keeping everyone out of it that's why I chose to go...yeah they try to help you...but it was just getting everyone involved, and I just didn't want anyone involved in on it anymore and trying to talk to him about it. His brothers...they'd try to stop him and they're having a fight...you know the whole family thing. To me it was get myself outa there and then they're not involved anymore.*

Thus Te Whakaruru provide a literal Refuge not only from Tem but also from the interference of her family.

*The family get too involved...the blame thing...it was your fault and you did this and...(that's) what I found with family...(so) you don't tell them what your partner does... That's why I didn't want them involved this time because it gets too much with the family...they hammer down on you and blame you about the relationship's and the rest of it...my sister nitted out because I'm in the Refuge.*

In Rangimarie's opinion, Tem gamed the criminal justice system, getting his case repeatedly adjourned.

*He'd fight it and argue and go "not guilty" and then get it transferred... That's why we went around courts, been up for over a year...it was on going...you've added another assault and another assault but the judge in September...she could see...what was happening.*

Tem was eventually sentenced to two and half year's imprisonment in relation to a number of assaults on Rangimarie. She is not completely free from him: he is writing to her from prison. He tells her about his progress in the anger management programmes and the drug and alcohol programmes.

Rangimarie liked the rules of the safe house

*Like I like the rules of no alcohol...you can come home and lax out and watch tv and that you don't have to put up with anyone raving drunk.*

She said she was determined to stay active and motivated during her time in the Refuge

*So yeah I keep more active...in Refuge, it was good to keep active...because instead of getting depressed... because that's what I think happens with us (in Refuge). After a week, get into a routine and things, because you're left to yourself. They'll (Refuge staff) help you with some things but you gotta*

*do it yourself...because the whole thing is for you to become independent so that you don't rely on them to drive you around...(so as) to find your own way. They'll take you to the doctor, lawyer's, whatever...but if you can find your own way they prefer you to do that...*

To keep busy, Rangimarie also contributed to household duties and the shopping for the safe house,

*I was always off doing things, and like I'd do the all the household things. I did all the shopping for the women and...but all the women vote and choose...yeah, and because I'm a bargain hunter...the women just fill out what they want and I'll go and buy it wherever...and just give them the receipts at the end of the week.*

She was also keen to be able to support the mothers with their children while there.

*Like if a mother had something to go with the children I'd go along with them. Like at the kohanga or anything, that, I don't mind doing that... to help her with the children or up town or whatever. I didn't mind helping them out with that. I think that's why (they) didn't want me to move (from the safe house).*

Rangimarie can see how much support the young mums coming into the Refuge need. It's almost as if she can see herself in them and knows that the road ahead is not going to be an easy one. She has a lot of advice to offer them. She recalled telling one young mum,

*You know the signs of what he's gonna do, you can see it so... why don't you just do the runner before he actually gets to that point instead of waiting for it? ... Hide a phone in the bush in a plastic bag...to do the runner...(have) an escape route... but it's getting worse...he's gonna put you in hospital... I'm older: been there, done that...I know what's happening and what I'm in for compared to them (the new mums). They're still confused.*

After three months in the safe house, Rangimarie moved into her own flat. She felt that she was ready to be "transitioned." She is doing well for herself now. She has secured part time work as a cleaner and moved into a better flat. She has set herself a goal to be debt free in six months. She is living a happier, freer and more fulfilling life now. She told us,

*I like being in my own place, yeah. I'm off doing my own things and I'm a lot better now and I know where he is, you know?*

Tem, who is six months into his prison term, writes to her regularly and says he is doing anger management and drug and alcohol courses to address his problems. She seems to take a quite a considered approach in relation to Tem.

*He's getting cleaned up now – well sort of – yeah, which he's happy about – getting sorted. Hmmm.*

And in response to our question, she said

*Yeah. I probably would go and visit him but I'm not in any hurry or anything like that.*

There have been positive changes in her whānau too. Her mother left her father and lives back in her family homestead with her two eldest granddaughters and great grandson. Rangimarie also has more contact with her sisters. She talks proudly about how well her sisters have done in spite of the drinking and violence. She keeps in regular contact with her niece (her sister's daughter) and children, with whom she is very close.

### **Reflections**

Rangimarie seems to have come some distance from her self-described *Once Were Warriors* background. As described above, there seem to have been some positive changes in her whānau. In what might seem counter-intuitive to some readers, it seems that Rangimarie moving away from whānau, at least initially, may have been an important step in some of these changes. It seems likely that the Refuge provided the space she needed to renegotiate the relationship with her family. Rangimarie is certainly quick to point out the support she is still receiving from the Refuge. All of the furniture and linen in her flat were supplied through Te Whakaruruhau and her advocate keeps in touch.

*Yeah even now they've been here like once a week...and we have a cup of tea. And (they ask) do I need anything? ... Do you need us for any help you know to do with WINZ or anything like that? I just give them updates.*

### **Case study 6: Sophie**

Sophie is the only child of her parents' marriage; however she has a number of half siblings. Early life was not easy for Sophie and her siblings – her sister was raped by their mother's partner and Sophie was sexually abused by a family friend, later becoming a ward of the state. Her mother was involved in gangs through her marriage to a Black Power member, and then to a Highway 61 member. Sophie's mother experienced mental illness. Sophie spent quite a lot of time living with her grandparents, especially after her mother entered a new relationship.

Sophie described her mother as

*Very controlling, she's very abusive emotionally, very socially abusive, psychological – and physical with me... She made up lies about me and caused a lot of trouble for me and my children. And she's violent. She still smashes me over today. She smashed me over when I was pregnant with Sarah. She bailed me against the wall and strangled me till I nearly passed out.*

Subsequently, Sophie's mother made allegations that Sophie was abusing her own daughter.

Sophie no longer has contact with her mother. Sometimes, acquaintances try to pressure her into renewing her relationship with her mother, but as far as Sophie is concerned, she could

*...never trust her again, I never take my daughter around, put her in that position. She has mood swings, she smashed my sister over and then me, then she twisted it all around and lied and said it was me, so that caused a big problem for me... when I got to court for Sarah.*

Sophie's biological father has been supportive of her although his ill-health and the fact that he lives outside the country means this support is limited.

When we first spoke to Sophie, she stated that she had not had any significant contact with her siblings for years.

*If they see me they'll stop and give me a quick kiss and a cuddle along the road, so if I see them I'll give them a sneaky kiss and a cuddle, and yeah give baby a kiss. It's just because my ex-partner threatened to kill them with a firearm if I went near them so that caused a bit of trouble. So I don't blame them.*

Sophie has four children. The eldest two are the children of her first partner, Joe. The third child was born while Sophie was single. The youngest child, Sarah, was born to Sophie's second partner, Paul.

### ***The relationship(s)***

Sophie said her first partner, Joe, was "extremely violent", describing incidents involving firearms, threats to kill her, threats to kill members of her family, sabotage (he cut the brake lines of her car) and kidnapping the children. At one stage, the children were taken into CYF's care but were later returned to Joe with whom they remained for a number of years.

Joe was effective in alienating the children from Sophie. She recalled

*By the time my kids came back (temporarily) they were looking at me and practically spitting on me... They were calling her (Joe's new partner) "Mum" and stuff... That caused big attachment problems between me and my children.*

Joe was also effective in alienating Sophie from her family. She explained

*Every time I tried to take the kids away... he just caused trouble for my family, for me, so people wouldn't want anything to do with me. So I didn't... I understood when my stepmother said "No, I don't want you to have anything to do with your sisters at the moment."*

When Sophie and Paul met, she was in a vulnerable state. As well as lacking whānau support, she had recently lost access to her children. She recalled

*To save the kids I ended up giving them up, and I tried to get on with my life and I met Sarah's dad... I had issues from my last partner. I had just lost my children. Well I sent my children away so I was grieving for them when I met Sarah's dad. I didn't really care too much about myself".*

She had also started using drugs to help her cope with the grief of losing her children, which she said, “Broke my heart”.

Meeting Paul seemed like a fresh start. She was optimistic about their future, hoping for “Another chance to have another beautiful baby”. She stopped using drugs when she found out that she was pregnant. She was “Looking forward to being a mum again, making it work again one more time.”

She described their relationship as initially “good”. Paul was heavily involved in illicit drugs, using methamphetamine and growing cannabis, but he also worked full time, did all the cooking and could be very charming.

*He was totally different from my other partner. He used to spoil with money, me and my kids. He'd spoil them with stuff, spend thousands on them – just like that – go down the road, walk out of the shop with a thousand dollars' worth of presents – spoil them with this and that...He'd give me money, give me \$500 to give to them and put in their bank. That was cool. I never ever got that (previously). I've never got that from their father... He bought me a car and everything.*

Paul did not have children of his own. As is sometimes the case, the violence started when Sophie became pregnant,

*He didn't start hitting me til I got pregnant. We did arguments when I wasn't but he never beat me up til I got pregnant with Sarah and after I had her, it got really bad, really bad. But bad to her too.*

Like Sophie, Paul had grown up with violence.

*He beat me the exact same way his mother and them did. It was always eight times, apparently – it was always eight times with a chair, so he beat me the same way. Rammed my head through the walls of the lounge and tried to hit Sarah with a chair.*

On another occasion, he threatened to kill Sarah. As well as the physical violence and threats of physical violence, there was also emotional and psychological abuse. For example,

*He'd been screwing around and I found texts on his phone, and I'm preparing for a baby and scrubbing down his walls...and he just turned on me. He'd thrown me out of the house in my pyjamas about a month before because he couldn't find fifty bucks, and he threw me out, asked me where his money was and I didn't know.*

### **Seeking help**

Sophie has sought help from Refuge on a number of occasions during both her relationships.

*It's a long history, a long history of Refuge. They supported me right through with all my children, court cases and CYF. I used to ring them every*

*now and again, every time I got a hiding I would ring... Refuge just about helped me raise my children.*

In fact, it is easy to think of Refuge as having provided an alternative whānau for Sophie. Perhaps this is best exemplified by the fact that when she went into labour with Sarah, Sophie had neither a family member nor a partner there to support her. Instead, it was two Refuge advocates who were in the delivery room with her.

*(They were) with me holding my hand, turning up my gas. They were all around me when I had Sarah – clothed me, fed me, drove me everywhere.*

Refuge organised legal advice. Through this, Sophie got a protection order and a parenting order giving her the day-to-day care of Sarah. Most importantly for Sophie,

*The judge proposed no contact so I don't have to keep going back. So I don't have to have contact with (Paul).*

Sophie's advocates helped with the practicalities of re-establishing her life in the community. They took her to appointments with WINZ. When the time came for her to transition to the community, they helped her move into her new flat. The Refuge also

*Gave me beautiful things for my last flat. Sarah's father just striped me of everything.*

Another way in which her advocates helped was to introduce her to her church. As with many women who have been in an abusive relationship, Sophie had become quite isolated. Through her involvement with the church, Sophie has developed a sense of belonging to a safe community. She started to attend social occasions on the weekends and, in her words, has become more

*...sociable, energetic... Church has given me that, that direction and stability, just learning about God and stuff, because I never had that in my childhood.*

When we last spoke to her, Sophie told us that changed work commitments meant that she has not been able to attend church as frequently as she had previously but it is still an important part of her social support network. For example, she had just recently had a day at the beach with her church whānau.

An important part of the programme for Sophie has been addressing issues in her parenting of Sarah. Sophie talked about being told by the judge and lawyer during the court hearings that she had to do a course to address attachment concerns in her relationship with her daughter.

*I didn't know what they meant by attachment concerns... They tried to say there was no attachment between me and Sarah, but I thought that meant no love, like I didn't love my daughter and she didn't love me.*

Participating in a parenting course was a big commitment for Sophie. By this time, she had left the Refuge and was working in a cleaning job. She had to go to the course on

her day off and getting to the course involved two bus trips each way. In fact, she was unable to complete the course but has become more knowledgeable. Here, the course seems to have helped but in addition, Sophie has been reading (“a few books, heaps of women’s stories growing up”) and listening to a parenting programme on the radio. Sophie understands that attachment issues can arise “from being hurt from your childhood, like losing your children or grief.” She began to consider her responses to Sarah and is becoming more confident that Sarah will still be with her tomorrow, that she is not going away and that it can be safe and tolerable for them to be separated. For example, Sophie is now quite confident in leaving Sarah at day-care, not something she could easily do previously.

Sophie values Sarah’s education and the links that participation in kohanga have provided both for Sarah and herself. On one of our visits, Sophie proudly showed us photographs of her and Sarah with Sarah’s kohanga friends. Sophie contributes to Whānau discussions about the kohanga.

Become financially independent has been a crucial step in the programme for Sophie. Initially, she got a part-time cleaning job. It wasn’t all plain sailing: Sophie lost her job because she “Got snappy at the bosses and they got me out of there”. Nevertheless, they gave her a good reference. A colleague mentioned that there was a vacancy at a rest home. Sophie submitted her application, was called her back for an interview while she was waiting for the bus home and offered the position the same day. She is now setting long term goals.

*I want to work my way up, nursing’s my long term goal, just have to stick at it for a couple of years. I cleaned for two years; I’m ready for a career.*

Her employers have already paid Sophie to attend some training, helping her obtain a certificate in manhandling. Currently Sophie is studying for another certificate, and has completed a number of unit standards for this. She anticipates that this qualification will take approximately seven months to complete. With training will come pay rises; there are also weekend and night shift bonuses. Walking this new path represents a significant accomplishment for Sophie, who said

*I did it – I found my direction. Couldn’t see me in that job a couple of years ago, caring for people. I didn’t have the energy. I have feelings about them, I care for them... I’ve come out of that victim mode I was in a lot. I see it at work a lot and I knew I was in it a lot.*

### Reflections

Sophie reported that the support of her advocate has made a significant and on-going contribution to her life.

*From the time I came down from up North she has been my advocate, supported me and Sarah being together. If it wasn’t for (advocate), I wouldn’t have Sarah today...she supported me with CYF. They (Refuge) knew I was a good mum. (Previously) I had no one there to support. There was no support at all. Everyone wanted Sarah taken away from me*

*because of my history, because I exposed her to violence. Everyone said it was my fault that I got a hiding and that Sarah got hit from her father.*

The faith of the Refuge staff in Sophie's ability to nurture Sarah helped her to regain her belief that she was a competent mother.

*They didn't watch me 24/7. They weren't always in my room. They trusted me – they knew I was a good mum – they just let me get on with my life. They would support me; they wouldn't let anyone run over me like CYF or my partner.*

Extricating herself from violent intimate relationships has not occurred as a single, discrete step for Sophie, but it is an achievement of which she is justifiably proud.

*This time, this will be my third time at Te Whakaruruhau, and I did it this time. Yeah, I was just scared of everything, I didn't trust anyone. I trusted (advocate) and (advocate). They supported me with CYF and I knew I wasn't going to lose my girl. It was time to get it together.*

Sophie did not have any suggestions for areas in which the Refuge service could be improved. The only difficulty related to Refuge services that she could recall experiencing was having

*Ups and downs with the women. Towards the end I started fighting with the women. I had been in there too long I was sick and tired of it. I was getting a bit anti. I used to feel sorry for Sarah all the time cause she used to get the kids that were coming in there, everyone had their own problems. Yeah, we were all trying to look out for our own children. Sarah used to cop a bit, so that's probably why I spoilt her when we got out – I used to feel sorry for her.*

As she becomes more independent, Sophie sees less of her advocates but Te Whakaruruhau is still part of her life. Sophie told us that at Christmas

*(Advocate) brought me over toiletries and slippers. Made me feel good because I didn't get a present from anywhere else – didn't get to see my (other) kids.*

The security offered by the Refuge is evidenced by Sophie's certainty that their support will be available should she need it.

*The Refuge are the only people I've had since I was pregnant with Sarah. Yeah, the only people that supported me, right from before I gave birth to her. And they'll be there when anything goes wrong...Anything. I just have to ring them.*

There are some tentative signs that Sophie is rebuilding her relationship with her own Whānau. She has made contact with a sister to whom she was close. She reported that the conversation was "good" but that rebuilding their relationship will be a slow process.



Sophie is now enjoying a peaceful, violence-free life, developing her own concept of Whānau ora. She commented

*A healthy family? I don't know, what is a healthy family? A positive family, working family, supportive? This is my family; I want it...safe, no yelling, no fighting and screaming...Yeah, no fighting or screaming or hitting your kids. We've got a good life, just quiet, no big dramas going on.*

### **Case study 7: May**

May grew up in a Middle Eastern country. Violence was not part of her family background: she described her parents as having had a loving and supportive marriage. However, she did have to assume quite a lot of responsibility within the family: her mother died when May was 17 years old and May had to look after her much younger sister.

May was working as a nurse when she was introduced to Hassan by a mutual friend. Hassan, had lived in New Zealand for 15 years before returning to their homeland where they met. She recalled that

*When he came and I talked with him and I found him nice and all the family talk nice about him. Then I agreed to marry him.*

Six months after meeting him, May married Hassan and emigrated to New Zealand with him. Unlike her, he had family here: two brothers living in Wellington and Christchurch respectively. Hassan had been married before. The three children from that marriage lived with their mother in America.

#### ***The relationship***

May described her relationship with Hassan as initially “nice”. Having spent six months establishing a relationship with him in their home country, she was not expecting the dramatic change in Hassan’s behaviour that followed the move to New Zealand.

*At first it was nice. Until I came here and he started to be changed. I don't know why... (Perhaps) he was nice at the first just to agree for marriage and after that... he lies for many things. And promise me for many things but nothing happened, and he start talking bad language.*

May gave birth to their son, Omar. Hassan’s abusive behaviour became “physical.”

*It start here in New Zealand, like push my shoulder, if I try to discuss something. I think he want to scare me and like talk in high (i.e. loud) voice, and push me like that or throw the phone so I feel afraid at first, and when I wanted to talk I stopped talk because I feel afraid.*

The violence escalated when they returned to the Middle East for a holiday. May suspects that this reflected Hassan’s knowledge that legal repercussions were less likely there than New Zealand.

*When we go to (homeland), maybe because he know that if he make something like that in (homeland), not like that in New Zealand. He can hurt me and yeah, I can go to the police but nothing would happen with him. So he catch me like that from my clothes, and from my arm, and push my son to me twice and I feel scared.*

Due to her fear, May went to live with her sister. Hassan returned to New Zealand without her but he was eventually able to coax her to join him. May was hoping that

*Maybe he would change because I just married to have family, to stay in family. I hate divorce for my son, not for me, I want my son live with his father and his mother, but not like that. Especially not my husband when he get upset he can't control himself and talk in front of my son.*

But Hassan did not change. He wanted to control May,

*He thought that he has the right to take everything...like control. Control. I must make everything to make him happy. I must obey him. I must say okay all the time. He thinks it is his right to do that but nothing like that for me. I must not ask for (any)thing... I don't control but I want to have voice to agree, refuse, but no, (according to Hassan) I must agree all the time.*

Although the physical violence was infrequent, it achieved its purpose: "I feel scared from him." There was also the fact that on one occasion Hassan showed that he was prepared to hurt even Omar, shoving him while he was feeding. Moreover, Hassan was effective in isolating May, expecting her to remain at home to cook and clean. Unsurprisingly, these all had an effect on her well-being, to the point where May was prescribed anti-depressants.

*I feel depressed, when I came here because I have no family, different country... And I must not talk about anything. I must obey, say okay...He wants me just to stay at home, keep clean and make food and that's all... Even when he came from work I feel lonely because (there was) no talking about anything, nothing...I feel I am nothing in his life... Even my own husband don't talk with me.*

### **Seeking help**

May thinks the infrequency of the physical abuse contributed to her willingness to remain in the relationship for so long.

*I think emotional abuse worse than physical abuse. It was like he keep me down. Because if they hit you, you can say it's abuse and walk away but if they don't hit you, it can be harder.*

However, a turning point came for May when she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. May expected that Hassan would offer some support: however she was again disappointed.

*When I detect my disease and I read a book about cancer because the surgeon said you must decide what option you want to take, and I read*

*that book and (Hassan) started to talk “Why you read this book? You must go and prepare my dinner.” And I said okay, just one minute and he said “No, no, no, go!” and started to talk in bad language and I started to cry. It was not good for me. I don’t accept something like that.*

Hassan’s abuse extended to the spiritual realm.

*He wants me to wake up at five o’clock exactly to pray. When I detect my disease and I feel depressed more... and I have asthma – all these come together, I can’t wake up at five o’clock to pray and my God forgives that to me, but he (Hassan) not accept that. He woke up me at five o’clock and started talking bad language, something like “You are animal, you must wake up now and pray, no-one stay at this home without pray.” But it’s between me and my God and I can pray at any time.*

As May put it,

*At this time I feel no (longer any) reason to live with him. You know, I need someone to support me. (I have) no family here, I haven’t anyone here and he was (still) the same, control and bad language and don’t think about me or emotional...nothing. And I decide no, I can’t stay with him, no reason to stay with him.*

May confided in her Plunket nurse. It was through the nurse that May learnt about Refuge.

May’s decision to leave her marriage came as a surprise to Hassan, who was counting on May’s isolation to keep her in the relationship. As May explained,

*He was married before and I think the same happened with ex wife and she left him and study and work and she live now in America. She become very successful woman, but he thinks I’m stupid, I can’t do anything [laughing]. I think he never hear anything about Women’s Refuge. He live here for more than 25 years and he never know anything about that. And I live here for three years and I know about Women’s Refuge. Maybe it was a surprise for him. How can she move? How can she leave the house?*

Life has changed in a number of positive ways for May since leaving Hassan. She reported that Omar has formed friendships with other children and is becoming bilingual. She has formed friendships with a number of people from her homeland. She has to be cautious as it is a relatively tight-knit community, and she is wary of those who may know her husband and prove themselves untrustworthy. Having access to Arabic television stations has also helped May to feel more at home; she stressed the importance of simply hearing her most familiar language.

The Refuge appears to have taken over the functions of the family that May lacks in New Zealand. She reflected

*I feel safe here (at Refuge). When I came (to Aotearoa) because I have no family, I don’t know anything about New Zealand, the system. How can I*

*leave? How can I rent house? I have no money – many things like that. But when I came here (to Refuge), they helped me with many things like lawyer, and take money from Work and Income and I live here and I can stay with my son in my own good house. I can ask about anything I don't know. They help me many things.*

Having space from her abusive marriage also allowed May to stop taking her antidepressants and to feel “better emotionally and physically.”

As is often the case, especially for women with children, coming into Refuge has not meant an end to contact with Hassan.

*He still make trouble with me. For anything. When I bring Omar to him, he said Omar was feel cold, “You must put heavy clothes (on)” And when I put heavy clothes (on) he said Omar become sick “Because you put heavy clothes (on him)” – something like that. All the time he is never happy about anything. ..All the time I am wrong, yeah, even if (Omar) feel sore in his tummy (Hassan) said “Yeah, (that’s) because of your food, this is from your food” – all the time like that.*

Refuge staff have helped May in her dealings with Hassan. For example, he initially refused to agree to Omar moving from the kindergarten he attended to one closer to May's home. The Refuge staff supported her through this process. On one contact visit, Hassan attempted to keep Omar from returning to his mother. She recalled

*He tried to take me outside the car and take my son from me. And the crisis woman was there and they call the Police. So I know him, he can do something like that again.*

On another occasion, when Hassan brought Omar back home,

*He tried to go inside. The woman from the safe house was here and she tried to stay in front of the door and he can't go inside. I talked to the lawyer about that and he asked if he want to go inside the house to just stay outside the house... He try to do that like something funny and if I allow him to do that he will stay. But I don't want that.*

May is confident that he will not attempt this again as he has realised that she now has support and is willing to discuss such matters with her lawyer. May suggested

*Before yeah, he think I am afraid to talk, or I can't talk to anyone. But he knows now if he makes anything I will talk to my lawyer so he will not try again.*

May has now moved into her own place. Her growing sense of autonomy is clear.

*I start to think about study, work, depend on myself. Maybe until now I didn't start, maybe because of my operation, everything come together, but now I wanted to do all of that, even my pray, improve my relation with my God.*

May's increased autonomy was also expressed in her relationship with her physical body and her developing sense of physical well-being. While at the safe house, May was eating better and put on weight. Now she has joined a gym and has lost over ten kilograms in several months after moving into her own home. The change was also evident in May's physical presentation: she looks healthier and is wearing bright colours.

When we first spoke to May, she was unsure what she wanted to do. She now has a plan: she wants to learn to drive (she has booked the test for her learner's licence), she wants to improve her English, and she wants to study nursing to upgrade her qualifications for New Zealand registration. She knows that she needs to be prepared for moving off the Domestic Purposes Benefit. Reflecting on the progress she has made, May said

*Yeah, (I have) changed. And because I feel better, I'm not depressed now so I like to go out. I like to depend on myself. I feel self confidence now – not like before.*

### Reflections

Overall, May found her experience at the Refuge to be positive. In particular, she spoke of the extensive physical and practical help that she received. When May was required to stay in hospital to undergo an operation for her cancer, her advocate took her to the hospital and paid her a post-operative visit. Furthermore, when she returned to the whare, they

*Ask me if you want anything? Or if I can help you? If you want to clean or wash or anything I can help you. It was nice but I was lucky because I just remove the ovary so I can move, even when I (first) came (out of hospital) I did it all myself, but they were nice with me. They take care of me.*

She also explained that the Refuge has helped her to manage issues such as organising telephone contracts over the telephone, a task that she was not able to do herself at that point due to language difficulties. When she was ready to leave the safe house, the Refuge also supplied her with the essentials for her home and helped her to move in.

May reflected on the communal living arrangements of the Refuge. There were two sides to this coin. On one hand, it reduced her isolation and helped both May and her son to connect to a wider community, aiding them in establishing a sense of place. She explained

*It is good for me because I was isolated before. I live here for four years and I don't know anything about some of these places. And it is good for my son: he is contact with other people and go to many places and have fun.... I found many people support you. I know many things from the other people even here, I know many things from the other women, it's a good thing.*

On the other hand, she was not confident in discussing the financial issues of a shared food budget. And there were practical issues, such as wanting to change the television

channel but feeling unable to ask. Ultimately, this tension motivated May to move into her own home where she has more control over her environment.

Overall, May was very positive about her experiences of Refuge. There were, however, some glitches. Each of these involved Omar's contact visits with Hassan. May was heavily dependent on advocates for practical help at these times and, as described above, the arrangements were often quite fraught. On two occasions, things did not go to plan because an advocate was unavailable or late. Ordinarily, and in a context of good will, there would have been no problem but May was, understandably, very anxious that a failure to honour agreements about visits could have drastic consequences for her.

*I feel afraid maybe he can use something like that against me.*

While they provoked anxiety, May emphasised that such incidents were isolated, and that the Refuge was "a good place". She also appreciated that the advocates were very busy, saying that the problems may have occurred "Because many people here and everyone have trouble and problem."

One thing that has proved particularly important during her transition to life in the wider community is May's friendship with her advocate. This too has undergone a transition: a professional relationship formed within the context of service provision has evolved into a genuine friendship based on mutual respect and shared experience. May explained

*My friend from the safe house had this cancer too. She's like me, she doesn't think about all of that, she focus on the future. Her life is very nice, and she is an old woman but I like her because she enjoys her life. She encourages me.*

### **Case study 8: Harmony**

When our interviewer first met Harmony, she looked unwell. She had facial eczema, looked tired and worn out, was significantly overweight, and seemed nervous and ill at ease. She talked very fast, often repeated herself, and found it difficult to acknowledge her role in her current situation, often blaming and exaggerating the faults of others. Her case file was voluminous. It was clear that Harmony had a history of abusing drugs and alcohol and that she had experienced mental health issues. At one stage, she was prescribed anti-depressant medication. Case notes indicated a recurring tendency to escalate certain situations until they blew completely out of control, ending with loud yelling and verbal abuse. In fact, Harmony had been convicted of child abuse and both her children were taken into care.

By the time of the last visit, things had improved significantly. She looked really well, and she said that she felt good. Although she still smoked, Harmony said that she had completely stopped using any sort of recreational drugs or alcohol. Although she would like to have a drink "now and then", she realised that she couldn't as she "didn't want to go down that path again." She was no longer on medication for depression, saying that she no longer needs it. Her affect would suggest that this indeed is the case.

Nevertheless, Harmony's journey continues: she has yet to regain the day-to-day care of her children.

### *The relationships(s)*

Harmony was – and still is – in a relationship with Jim, who is the father of their two children. Jim freely admits to having been violent. However, as Harmony describes her background, it is the violence of her father and other men which seems to have been more significant in Harmony's life. This is partly exemplified by the fact that her mother is a previous resident of Refuge.

*Mum felt like she had to protect us...my Mum's quite nice natured and so she hadn't need that crap...basically she just kept on running away every time with us, in the car, on the bus, and everything, and stuff, that was it. Dad laid this, like, court case on her and said "Mum wants to take my daughters with them. See what she did?" And he did. He won. Because he had the money, and stuff, and it was just, his family backed him up too, I mean, she didn't have a great, you know, life.*

When telling this story, initially Harmony blamed her mother for abandoning them – she eventually left the country and started a new life in Australia. It was only on unpacking the story that it became clear that Harmony's mother tried very hard to keep her four children safe (Harmony is the second eldest) by regularly moving from place to place and, at times, moving to safe houses provided by women's Refuge.

Unfortunately, this tactic backfired: it was used against her during the divorce proceedings to show that she was unable to provide a stable and secure family home for the children. As a result, custody of all four children was given to Harmony's father as he was able to show financial security and stability (not to mention being able to afford a good lawyer). This was despite his on-going violence towards others, his predisposition to gambling and drinking, his affairs with other women, and his inability to keep her safe from molestation by other (male) family members, particularly when they were drunk. In fact, for Harmony, the smell of alcohol evokes strong memories of sexual abuse.

*Because his brother has touched me. And it smelled of alcohol. Plus (a maternal relative)... and it's just the alcohol, and when I smell the alcohol, you know what I mean? Just the smell of the alcohol, because I was touched. Yeah. And it's a reflection (of the abuse), you know what I mean? Yeah. I don't really want that around (my children). No. It's just like "No way" Because it's the smell, you know what I mean? And every time I smell that smell, it's just, it's just horrible, you know what I mean?*

The use of "You know what I mean?" is suggestive of uncertainty and a lack of confidence. It was a strong characteristic of Harmony's speech the first three times our interviewer met her. Interestingly, this phrase all but disappeared in the last two interviews. This tended to confirm the overall impression of someone more settled and more confident in herself.

The physical violence from her father and the sexual abuse by other men were only part of the pattern of abuse Harmony has experienced. She has had difficult relationships with both of her step-mothers. At times this resulted in violence. Harmony admitted her part in these episodes, and that she had been violent towards others. One result of this was that Harmony was asked to leave her home that she shared with her father and step-mother. This was despite Harmony being financially responsible for the lease on the house, and having a 1 year old son at the time.

By this stage, Harmony was in a relationship with Jim. The couple subsequently had a second child, a daughter, but the instability continued. Jim was a heavy drinker and user of drugs. He was eventually convicted and jailed on cannabis-related charges.

Like many victims of abuse, Harmony self-medicated with illicit drugs and alcohol. While the use of drugs and alcohol may have numbed the pain of the past, it also contributed to an escalation in violence, both in relation to Jim, but also in relation to the children. After seriously injuring her son, Harmony was convicted of assault and sentenced to home detention. Both children were removed from her under guardianship orders and placed by CYF, one with each of two of Harmony's three sisters. This exacerbated an already tense family situation. Her case file is full of incidents where her father and/or sisters turn up, Harmony doesn't cope, and the situation escalates resulting in loud, abusive yelling and "low level" violence. Refuge staff were often phoned by a near-hysterical Harmony at these crisis times. When they arrived, they often had the dual challenge of calming Harmony down as well as dealing with angry family members.

### *Seeking help*

As mentioned above, Harmony first came to Refuge as a child, in the company of her mother and sisters. It was never completely clear what it was that first brought Harmony to Refuge as an adult, but she does now have a long history of involvement with Te Whakaruruhau. However, it is clear that regaining the care of her children is a major motivation for Harmony to make changes in her life.

In one of our early interviews, Harmony talked about being on home detention ("home D") and the practical help that her Refuge case-workers gave her.

*When I was on home D and stuff like that...I couldn't do everything I want on my own, and stuff they had to pick me up, yes and stuff with my medication and plus my shopping yes and plus with the probation officers...because I was on home D...so they had the taxi driver come and pick me up and you know take me...so I had two people come in into my life you know what I mean, incredibly, and plus Women's Refuge so it was pretty good on home D – I wasn't so stuck here insid., I actually had the chances, like, to go out and do these kind of things with my women's Refuge people.*

This quote shows how few people Harmony had in her life who could act as positive supports for her. Having the "women's Refuge people" to do everyday tasks with her transformed home detention into a place where she could begin to engage in relationships with others that were affirming and empowering.



Over the last year or so, the Whānau Ora Wellbeing Service has provided a multi-faceted intervention to address Harmony's needs. These have encompassed the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of Harmony's life. Some aspects of the intervention have been provided by other agencies but Te Whakaruruhau has played a central role in developing the overall plan, making referrals and importantly, encouraging her to attend specific activities – as well as providing general day-to-day emotional and practical support.

For Harmony, one of the more significant parts of her overall programme has been the group sessions she has attended with Pai Ake Solutions. Although initially reluctant to engage in any sort of programme, Harmony began to attend after, in her words, the advocates “wore me down.” Harmony described one of the sessions she attended, in which the group were encouraged to view their own story alongside other stories of resistance to oppression.

*I've actually had a real good session at Pai Ake. We had empowerment and power... (The facilitator) read out the story about a native American woman... (who) wanted to teach her people that they're not slavery people, you know what I mean? And to not be abused and stuff and then we had to write out a story how we were abused, you know what I mean? ... It was really good, you know what I mean? Walking in other people's shoes... I've only got, like, two more sessions on that course, but I want to go back (for) one on one (counselling) and stuff you know what I mean? So I can sort of like – you know – still go back there and still, like – you know – have counselling with them.*

At that stage, “Want(ing) to go back” was a significant change for someone who had to be “wor(n) down” to get to the programme in the first place. Even though Harmony was finding it difficult to adequately articulate her feelings, the act of acknowledging her abusive childhood, meeting other women who had experienced similar acts of abuse, and having a safe place to discuss its impact created a healing environment. The healing was evident in the way Harmony mentioned feeling lighter (“bouncy”), “more relaxed... not so frustrated,” and being able to “let things go.” She reported that she felt happier after each session. These positive experiences and healing encounters were precious to Harmony, and she was very grateful to both the Te Whakaruruhau staff for their persistence and to the Pai Ake staff for their ability to effect positive transformation in her life.

Physical healing has been an important part too. Harmony has completed a drugs and alcohol programme. She acknowledges that drugs and alcohol were a factor in her offending and she expresses determination to stay clean and sober for the benefit of her children. As another part of physical healing, Te Whakaruruhau arranged an assessment with a general practitioner. As a result of this consultation, Harmony was prescribed anti-depressants. These helped with her mood swings and her grasp on reality. Advocates would check up on her and ask her if she was taking her pills. Interestingly, in recent months, Harmony has gone off the medication and seems to be just fine without it.

Anger management has been part of Harmony's emotional healing. She mentioned how much the techniques she has learnt help her when she starts feeling angry. She says she now knows that she can remove herself from the situation and calm down instead of escalating things. Going for a walk, leaving the room, ending the conversation are all tools that she has learnt as a result of her engagement with the Wellbeing programme.

An important part of the package is whānau healing. Harmony was only 12 when her mother left and went to Australia to live. As a result she had very little contact with her mother during her teenage years. Harmony missed her mother greatly. She felt a great sadness that she didn't have a mother to guide her through her teens into adulthood. In particular, she missed having someone show her how to be 'feminine'. Harmony remembered her mother as liking pretty, feminine things. She felt that if her mother had been around, she would have taught her, and her sisters, how to be feminine. As she puts it, "I would have been okay, with Mum, if she would have been here." Here, the use of the past tense reveals that Harmony herself acknowledges that she was not okay. Her recollections of her teen and early adult years are of family relationships that were unhealthy and contributed significantly to her not feeling or not being "okay."

With the encouragement of Te Whakaruruhau staff, Harmony contacted her mother via telephone. From this beginning has started a process of re-engaging in a positive, supportive relationship with her mother. While contact is currently limited to mail and telephone calls, her mother is planning a visit to New Zealand to see Harmony in the not-too-distant future. During one of our interviews, Harmony's mother phoned from Australia to wish her a happy birthday. Harmony was delighted to hear from her mother and, judging from the laughter and smiling evident throughout the conversation, thoroughly enjoyed the phone call. This reconnection with her mother has been very positive for Harmony, and has helped her to heal from some of the wounds caused by her mother's premature departure from her life.

By the time of our last interview, Harmony was working an early morning shift (20hrs a week) as a cleaner at a factory. While she prefers motel cleaning to factory work, Harmony also enjoys the sense of satisfaction of having a job, and having something to do during the day. During this interview, Harmony's supervisor rang to say that she had forgotten to clean the showers. Harmony felt that the supervisor was a bit picky. Harmony doesn't like working under her but understands that it is difficult to find work with a criminal conviction.

Things are more complicated in other areas of her life, especially her relationship with Jim and her children. On the one hand, the relationship with Jim is much improved. Jim was open with us about his past violence, which he linked to his consumption of drugs and alcohol. Like Harmony, he has been through drug and alcohol rehabilitation. Significantly, he is now taking medication. He said that he had resisted taking medication as he felt that would be admitting to being weak, but he had come to realise that taking "meds" was necessary to compensate for the damage his brain had suffered as a result of his history of substance abuse.

Jim said that he was working on fixing up the place he shares with Harmony. There were holes in the wall from where he had punched them in anger and frustration. He wanted to fix them up as part of his work in restoring the damage that he had done. He said that he had also apologised to Harmony's father for the damage that he had done as well. Previously he had just hidden when her father was around, but he didn't want to do that anymore, so he just fronted up and shaken his hand and said sorry.

Harmony said that since Jim had been taking medication, he had been much more pleasant to live with, that they had been having fun together and laughing and enjoying each other's company again. She said that the police hadn't been called to their place in over a month now, and that they no longer yelled at each other. She was very proud of this, especially not having the neighbours call the police on them for the past month.

While both Harmony and Jim talk positively about how things are going, the fact that just one month has gone since the last police call out – albeit that that call out was at the instigation of neighbours – suggests a degree of fragility about the changes achieved. As it stands, the couple continue to face challenges. One of the most significant of these is that they have concealed the fact that they are living together: neither CYF staff, nor Te Whakaruruhau staff know about this change in circumstances.

Both Harmony and Jim told our interviewer that they wanted to be able to be honest about living together, but felt constrained by the system. As mentioned earlier, both their children are subject to guardianship orders and are currently placed with other family members. Both Harmony and Jim said that being upfront about their relationship would likely undermine their attempts to regain the day to day care of their children. This may well be a realistic assessment. For obvious reasons, we haven't discussed the situation with the relevant CYF staff. However, in terms of general practice in statutory child protection work, it seems common for social workers to be very reluctant to return children to a couple when there has been a history of violence. Case study 2 illustrates this point: Helen and Shaun still don't have their children back full time. We make no judgement about whether Harmony and Jim are now able to provide a safe and nurturing environment for their children.<sup>1</sup> Nor do we want to assign responsibility for the fact that the relationship between statutory child protection workers and the parents of children in care has developed in a less than transparent manner. However, this situation does bring to the fore the challenges of balancing whānau reunification with the protection of children and the difficulties which can arise along the way.

Harmony does have contact with her two children. Both had come to stay during the summer holidays. However, she lost her temper with her son and as a result a neighbour phoned CYF who removed the boy. Harmony says she didn't physically assault her son but acknowledges that she was verbally abusive – and clearly, this was loud enough for a neighbour to hear. During our conversation she said that prior to

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<sup>1</sup> We can, however, assure readers that our assessment of the situation was that there was no imminent and/or serious threat to the safety of children, such as would justify breaching the confidentiality of research participants by making a report to CYF.

telling him off, her son had sworn at her, calling her a “fucking bitch” and she felt that that sort of language was unacceptable. She also felt that CYF had over-reacted to this incident. Subsequently, her son has remained with her sister, who lives close by. Harmony is supposed to have only supervised contact with her son. However, the contact is often unsupervised as her sister drops the boy off with her. Her daughter is still living in Auckland with her other sister.

### Reflections

In terms of strengthening whānau connectedness, Harmony could perhaps be regarded as a work in progress. As mentioned above, there are some promising developments in the relationship with her mother – and in relation to at least one of her sisters. She is having some contact with her children and is quite hopeful that she will have them returned to her. Jim is a little less optimistic. He said “It’s probably too little, too late”, meaning that while he and Harmony were now making good decisions and engaging in positive behaviours, because it had taken them both so long to get there, they would probably be unlikely to regain custody for quite some time. He was of the opinion that they needed to show that they could sustain this change for longer than a few months.

Harmony said that Te Whakaruruhau case workers were supporting her bid to have her children returned to her care and that she appreciated that support. She appreciated too, having someone to talk to. In fact, it is possible that loneliness is an issue for Harmony. She noted that she liked it when Mormon missionaries visited as she like the company. She said that they were very nice girls, and it was lovely to talk with them and that she enjoyed the positive interaction that they had. She wasn’t terribly interested in becoming a Mormon, and felt a bit bad that she was stringing them along a bit, but it was a nice way to pass the time. Harmony said that she also had an elderly Jehovah’s Witness lady who would come around for cups of tea and chats. Harmony said she enjoyed the company, and that she was a “lovely old lady.” Again, she had no intention of converting, but she just appreciated having some pleasant social interaction with others who wished her well.

On the other hand, Harmony felt proud that she no longer needed the intensive day-to-day assistance of advocates.

*I'm off-case, you know what I mean? She (the advocate) just comes in and pops in, yes, and if I do ring her up... she just comes and checks on me. And then with her job and stuff she takes a high intensity (cases) you know... Because (if you are) independent they let you do a lot on my own and not with other women (who) are so fragile and they can't get through the whole situation on their own.*

Harmony’s use of the term “other women” suggests that she no longer views herself as “high intensity” or “fragile”. She is distancing herself from those others, seeing herself as mostly autonomous. Although she is still in regular contact with her Refuge case-workers, this contact is now reduced to the occasional home visit and phone calls with regard to her on-going custody case. She appreciates knowing that if she needs help there is someone that she can call and takes pride in her increasing independence.

*With me I'm just like, no, I want to do this all by myself. But it's, like, I'm thinking if it's, like, you know, yes, and stuff, but it's good that, because they know that I can, you know, do this, you know, and stuff, but I just need them to still, like, you know, be there and something sort of, like, slips up, you know what I mean?*

Although Harmony is still struggling to adequately articulate her feelings, it is clear that she is aware that she no longer needs intensive, daily assistance from her case-workers. As mentioned earlier, she is looking much better and is sounding more confident. Although she still needs some on-going support, it seems like significant progress that she can now manage her own day to day life.

### **Case study 9: Aroha**

Aroha comes from a large family which, in many respects, is very supportive. However, it took Aroha a long time to talk to her mother and other family members about the abuse she was receiving from her partner, Richard. By that time, she and Richard had six children and Aroha had developed a significant substance abuse problem as she self-medicated against the effects of the abuse. However, once she sought help from Refuge, things changed quite quickly for Aroha. Her advocate describes her as an undoubted “success.”

In contrast to most of the women in our case studies, Aroha's upbringing was not marked by violence. Her immediate family – she is the eighth of eighteen children – were brought up in the Mormon faith. Tikanga was an important part of family life and Aroha grew up speaking Te Reo Maori. Her mother is described as the matriarch of the family.

#### ***The relationship***

Aroha got together with Richard when they were quite young. They married when Aroha was 19. By then they already had one child. Over the next few years, five more children were born. Two were “whangaied out” with other family members. They see a lot of their parents and siblings. Of the decision to whangai one of the children, Aroha said

*The reason why I gave her up was because she was a child of rape. My husband – we had a lot of times we were off and on throughout the relationship after marriage... Nothing against my daughter: it's just the way she was conceived that was really evil.*

Alcohol was a factor in Richard's violence. According to Aroha,

*He's got big issues with alcohol... the whole brunt of our stuff... was because of his alcoholism. And he was in big denial, he denied the fact that he had that problem.*

Money problems didn't help either: the violence got worse after Richard was made redundant. However, while alcohol and financial stress may have been triggers, it seems clear Richard felt entitled to control Aroha: she would only have to look at someone in a way he did like and he would beat her up.

While Aroha described her Whānau as “very tight”, for years she endured Richard’s violence without talking about it with her mother or her siblings.

*It’s a protective thing you do. You protect yourself by not saying things, but once you stop protecting yourself or your husband or whatever, once you stop that shit, the journey is much easier to do... Sometimes I reflect back to the ladies how it was before I came in here. Shit yes, I had a hard shell. You would not be my friend – that’s how ugly I was, because I was told, like with my husband, “No, don’t look at other people”... (the) physical violence wasn’t as often as the mental shit that was coming, psychological shit. “You’re fat, you’re ugly.” All that stuff came out, for years, and I thought “Okay I am fat, I’m this, I’m not pretty, I’m not this and the other.” All that stuff was my life, and I used to always look at other people like why don’t you get called that?*

From this account, it seems likely that the psychological abuse, “the mental shit”, has probably had a greater impact on Aroha than the physical violence. In particular, we can see here how Richard’s denigration of Aroha encouraged her to think of herself as worthy of neither the respect, nor the support of other people. Instead of seeking support, Aroha self-medicated.

*I hit the booze. I hit marijuana and that was me. That to me was my coping mechanisms.*

Unsurprisingly, the abuse left Aroha exhausted, worn down and depressed.

*I used to cry a lot, big time. I had a lot of crying days to myself. Where I got that strength from to pick me up was waking up and hearing the kids. That gave me that. “Okay pull yourself together lady. You’ve got to keep on going.”*

### **Seeking help**

While thinking about the welfare of the children helped Aroha cope with the abuse, recognising what it was doing to them was the impetus for her to seek help. She realised that although the children were generally not around when there was drinking, “They were there when the ugliness came out.” The final straw came when the children ganged up against Richard in an attempt to protect her.

*His kids, they nearly smashed him. My kids, they’re not very big but they practically had him up against the wall and shaking him. Because I was on the ground crying and then my daughters, like, came in. One shoved him against the wall like that and then the little one came under, went hook. But anyway that’s what happened... And then I thought about it: maybe I shouldn’t put you guys in that (situation) ever.*

Aroha packed up the house and moved herself and the four children to Refuge. She considered going to stay with whānau members but knew that Richard wouldn’t take long to find her: moving away from her home town to Hamilton and Te Whakaruruhau seemed a lot safer. She also laid a complaint of assault with the Police

and went to a lawyer to initiate applications for a protection order and a parenting order. Both orders were granted.

By this time, Aroha had confided in her mother about the abuse. Her mother was very upset to learn that the violence had been happening for a long time but she was also very supportive of Aroha. For example, she accompanied Aroha when she went to the lawyer.

As Aroha recounts this part of her story, there is a sense of her “coming out” as a victim of domestic violence. Her language is instructive: she talked in term of the “silence” being “broken”. She recalled meeting old school mates who asked her how she was doing.

*I ended up telling them, “I’m in refuge: I need help”. They’ve always known me as a strong-minded girl, never to back down, never stood up for any crap basically. Then again that could have been seen as a front for someone, somebody else, even myself when I looked at it. Once I started to share my korero with people, it helped break a lot of barriers that I had put up as a defence mechanism. I defeated myself so good, just stuck with me for ever and ever.*

Instead of relying entirely on herself (“stuck with me”) as she had in the past, Aroha embraced the opportunities for learning and healing. A 12-week education programme on violence helped her better understand the tactics of power and control to which she had been subjected and introduced her to other women facing similar challenges. When we first interviewed Aroha at Refuge, she told us,

*I’ve changed heaps since I’ve been here. I’ve had to stop smoking dope, because you can’t smoke drugs here. I’ve learnt to chuck in my alcohol thingy: that’s not a need anymore, because I used to need it because it would numb my (pain), and I would knock out on that stuff. I would wake up with a fricken throbbing headache, (laugh) “Oh shit, hang on I’ve got to play mummy now!”*

Aroha has since left the Refuge and is established in her own place with her children. She is much more involved in whānau activities, attending monthly hui. She has reconnected with the Mormon Church and is working in the automotive industry. She has got her finances sorted. The four children who live with her are settled and doing well at school. They have regular visits with their father and, we were told, there are “no safety issues”.

### Reflections

For Aroha, Refuge was initially a place of safety and respite.

*Once I knew that this is a safe house, no one can come up the driveway, no one’s going to spook you at night – well I felt like super comfortable and I had the best sleep ever.*

In fact, she described her time in the Refuge as having “a good break.” She appreciated the marae-like atmosphere.

*I like how these things are done. It's like being at a marae, in a way. You can't sleep like marae style, but it's like you can meet together, cook together, you clean up together, it's all good.*

For Aroha, supporting one another was part of the ethos of the Refuge but she noted the importance of respecting each other's story.

*You've got to have that understanding that you're here to help yourself, your whānau but be mindful of others because they're probably harder than you. They've got some harder issues than what I have and I've learnt to be a listener to a lot of them: try my hardest not to judge. That was a big thing, because you know, I'm a judgemental lady but coming in here you learn what's theirs is theirs, what's yours is yours. Don't take on other people's issues.*

Like the other women we interviewed, Aroha appreciated the help she got from advocates such as transport and support her in her dealings with other organisations, especially Housing New Zealand.

In our conversations, Aroha's talk often turned to her children.

*I think I put my kids through the stuff too, like not realising that what had happened to me was actually doing it to my kids. "You can't go there! Don't you do this! Don't you do that!" Whereas coming here is like go for gold. Everywhere there's that whole thinking change. Feeling safe.*

In fact, when asked what was the best part of Refuge, Aroha replied

*Best part being here? Seeing my kids happy. Seeing the whole change in me.*

Aroha's comments here are a reminder of how children are often central to women's decision making in relation to domestic violence. Sometimes women stay in relationships because they want to protect them from the abuser's violence (Stahly, 1999). Sometimes, as was the case with Aroha, women leave relationships because it will be better for the children. Whatever the circumstances, the wellbeing of children is a powerful motivator for most women. Compared to atomised (or siloed) interventions which work with *either* women *or* children, a Whānau Ora approach allows interveners to take a *both-and* perspective which is likely to be more effective.

## **Case study 10: Deborah**

Deborah is Pākehā. We interviewed her with the help of an interpreter: Deborah is profoundly deaf.

Deborah has limited family support. Her mother lives in Australia and Deborah does not have much contact with her father, although he does provide financial support when she requests it. She does have other family members and friends in Hamilton: some of the friends are involved in gangs.



### *The relationship*

Deborah was in an off-again-on-again relationship with Bruce for about eight years. They have three children aged between one and six years. The children are currently in CYF care.

Bruce was addicted to methamphetamine and alcohol. He would have parties all day. He was controlling and violent. He would take all of the money and Deborah would not know how she would cover the rent, phone, power and food. One of the legacies of the relationship is that Deborah now has a bad credit rating. Another is that by the time she came to Refuge, she too was addicted to methamphetamine.

The children became a source of conflict. Bruce would not play with them or engage with them. He would get angry with them and Deborah would try to distract them to minimise the risk that their father would hit them.

Bruce had several affairs, including one when Deborah was pregnant. Several times she asked him to leave but he would refuse and beat her. Mostly, Bruce escaped any consequences for such assaults but on one occasion, the police were involved: Bruce was subsequently convicted and served three months imprisonment.

We know little about the impact of the violence on the children but they were taken into CYF care as a direct result of Bruce's violence. That is, one day, a neighbour noticed that Deborah was very bruised and had black eyes. The neighbour notified CYF. The children were removed from Deborah and placed with her whānau. Deborah was taken to Te Whakaruruhau for her own safety

### *Seeking help*

Initially, the plan was for Te Whakaruruhau to work with both Deborah and Bruce to address the violence, the addiction problems and parenting issues, with the ultimate goal of having the children returned to them. However, Bruce failed to remain sober. He was counselled to move out of Hamilton, find a job and re-establish himself away from his usual environment. The focus then became teaching Deborah safe pathways in life, helping her to identify unsafe relationships and enhancing her parenting skills.

Subsequently, Deborah completed a drug and alcohol programme (with Pai Ake Solutions), a parenting programme (Incredible Years) and a women's empowerment programme (with the Hamilton Abuse Intervention Project). She proudly showed her completion certificates to our interviewer. Deborah impressed us as being highly motivated to make personal changes.

Deborah has now left Refuge. She has formed a new relationship. Her new partner is Māori and like her, deaf. He was described to us by a Refuge advocate as "a lovely young man." Initially, Deborah went to live with his mother but now the couple have their own place. Deborah's children have not yet been returned to her but the matter is currently before the Court. Te Whakaruruhau support Deborah's application to have her children back.

### *Reflections*

For Deborah, the ultimate goal of regaining the day-to-day care of her three children has not yet been achieved. However, she has made considerable progress towards this

goal, especially when one considers that it is not very long ago that she was living in a situation characterised by serious violence and drug abuse. She has been conscientious in completing a suite of programmes which have addressed the major issues in her life.

Deborah is very appreciative of the help she has received from Refuge. There have been three advocates with whom she has worked most closely. They have helped with programme referrals, liaising with CYF and other government departments, and helping her with her children. She thinks such help has meant that she is not stressed anymore.

#### 4: Other Findings

The remainder of our report addresses the key evaluation questions posed by the Ministry of Health. We have addressed these questions drawing on our observations, our interviews with key informants and information gathered in course of the case studies.

On the whole, we found the key evaluation questions to provide a useful framework for bringing together our overall conclusions about the programme. However, it should be noted that we have not specifically addressed the seventh question, *Were the objectives/outcomes of the initiative met?* It seemed to us that this question was addressed in three of the preceding sections, at least in the way we have chosen to respond to them<sup>2</sup>.

#### How was the initiative designed, developed and implemented?

As described in Section 1, the origins of the Whānau Ora Wellbeing programme lay, in part, in the recognition that unless women were provided with longer term support, many who entered the safe house would have little option but to return to the situation in which they and their children were abused. This recognition led to the establishment of the predecessor of the Whānau Ora programme, the Wellbeing and Transition programme.

As reported in our 2008 evaluation (Robins & Robertson, 2008), women participating in the Transition and Wellbeing programme identified various short, medium and long-term outcomes associated with their participation. Short term outcomes include improved communication, improved self-esteem, improved confidence and personal growth. Medium outcomes saw (re)engagement in training, education and for some, (re)entry into the workforce. Long term outcomes related to the establishment of a sustainable life style free from violence. These outcomes were attributed to a combination of “in house” activities and to other “external” programmes and resources to which Te Whakaruruhau advocates had facilitated women’s access. That is, one of

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<sup>2</sup> How has the target audience benefited from the implementation of the initiative? Did the initiative achieve what it set out to do at the beginning? Did the impact/outcome component of the evaluation demonstrate genuine change?

the strengths of Te Whakaruruhau's approach was their strong links with other agencies and services and their ability to mobilise a variety of resources and services which can help meet the needs of women and children. (Indeed, this has been characteristic of Te Whakaruruhau since its establishment. For example, Te Whakaruruhau was an important partner in the piloting of the Police pro-arrest policy in Hamilton in the mid 1980s.)

As positive as the outcomes of the Wellbeing programme were, Te Whakaruruhau managers identified further challenges. In particular, they noticed that many of the women they supported had relatively little whānau support. There were various reasons. Some women lived a long way from their tūrangawaewae and distance alone made the provision of support difficult. Sometimes, the situation was exacerbated by the fact that the geographic dislocation had lasted two or more generations, significantly weakening whānau ties. Even if whānau were closer to hand, some were struggling with the challenges of living in poverty and did not have the resources (physical or emotional) to support women and children in crisis. For some women, whānau was not a safe place for them to seek support. Some women chose not to alert whānau about the crisis: shame, humiliation and low self-esteem were thought to be barriers to seeking such support. In some cases, women feared that their whānau might experience retribution from their partner and/or his supporters if they went "public" about the violence. Such fears were particularly likely if the partner was associated with drug dealing and/or gangs (Te Whakaruruhau Incorporated, 2010, p. 5).

Te Whakaruruhau managers did not – and do not – see the Whānau Ora Wellbeing programme as necessarily being in a position to address all the challenges to Whānau Ora described above, at least, not in the short term. In the context of a discussion about the concept of Whānau Ora, one of the senior staff noted that a key principle of the government's approach to Whānau Ora is

*re-engagement – or reconnection – back to their (women and children's) Whānau networks: Whānau whanui. That's not going to happen here...not for DV (domestic violence), not at this level. Maybe in a year or two... There's an awful lot of work that needs to be done with the Whānau themselves to build their capacity and capability to be able to awhi their Whānau member well.*

We think this is an important point. It is standard practice for crisis line workers to ask women who call if they have whānau members to whom they can go to keep safe. Thus women with good whānau support are unlikely to enter the safe house. Nor are they likely to need long term support to re-establish themselves in the community if they do come into the safe house in a crisis. Almost as a matter of definition, women who enter the Whānau Ora Wellbeing programme will have very little support within the wider whānau. Dealing with the sorts of issues often present in the wider whānau (mentioned above) takes considerable time and resources. In the context of domestic violence, Whānau Ora is likely to be focused on mothers and their children, at least in the short term.

The Whānau Ora framework was a good fit with the general, holistic approach of Te Whakaruruhau. As it was explained to us, a central focus of the work of Te Whakaruruhau has been “systems.” Here, “systems” was being used to refer to the key Crown institutions whose responsiveness – or lack of responsiveness – can have a crucial impact on women and children who are experiencing domestic violence and child abuse. The main institutions relevant here are the Police, the District Court, the Family Court, CYF, Income Support, Housing New Zealand, schools and health services. As evident in our earlier evaluation (Robins & Robertson, 2008), much of the work of Te Whakaruruhau advocates is in relation to these institutions. As one of the managers recently told us,

*Our primary target there was to enhance the safety and welfare of women and children. In terms of Whānau Ora and iwi - it was the same thing. Working with individual whānau, hapu, iwi, to enhance the position, the status, and the wellbeing of women and children.*

Viewed from this perspective, Whānau Ora was a natural extension of the Transition and Wellbeing programme. Having a strong track record in advocating for women and children in respect of Crown agencies and other services, it is a relatively small step to be advocating for them in the context of whānau, hapū and iwi.

The emphasis in the statement above deserves further comment. While the *methodology* may involve working with “whānau, hapū, iwi” the *aim* remains “to enhance the position, the status, and the wellbeing of women and children.” As the managers pointed out, domestic violence is a gendered issue. Working effectively in the area requires a good understanding of the dynamics of violence. It requires understanding the various tactics by which abusive men maintain power and control over their partners and children. In their view, Te Whakaruruhau brings

*another level into Whānau Ora that says this is still a specialist area. Unless you have a clear philosophy and understanding of the dynamics of family violence then you can't be effective in supporting these whānau.*

The importance of working from a “clear philosophy and understanding of the dynamics of family violence” is also apparent in another aspect of Te Whakaruruhau’s approach: engaging with men.

In contrast with most non-Māori Refuges, Te Whakaruruhau has always been prepared to work with men. As the case study Helen shows, engaging her partner can be one of the crucial elements of effective advocacy with a woman and her children. But Te Whakaruruhau’s work with men has developed significantly in recent years as they have formed a close working relationship with Te Ao Marama, the Māori Focus Unit at Waikeria Prison. This relationship forms an important part of the context of Whānau Ora within Te Whakaruruhau.

The relationship between Te Whakaruruhau and Te Ao Marama dates back some years. Initially, it was largely limited to the Unit supplying Te Whakaruruhau with vegetables grown by inmates. More recently, prison managers invited Refuge staff to

visit the Unit to discuss other ways in which the Unit could assist. Subsequently, the collaboration has grown to encompass men on release to work

- Cleaning in and around the Refuge offices
- Cooking for staff in the Refuge and
- Carrying out repairs on damaged houses.

From our point of view, a marker of the extent to which men from Te Ao Marama have been integrated into Refuge work is that we would encounter them more often than not on our visits to the Refuge office. Typically, they would be preparing meals, washing up or making cups of tea. Over the past few months, several of the men who have come to the end of their sentences have had accommodation provided by Te Whakaruruhau staff. Although an informal arrangement, Te Whakaruruhau has become an important part of the re-integration of some men back into the community.

The reciprocal arrangement between Te Whakaruruhau and Te Ao Marama is not a part of the formal contract of the Whānau Ora programme. But we think it is important to mention it as it forms a significant part of the context in which the programme operates. Moreover, as we discuss below (page 66), the impact on the men seems to be quite profound and undoubtedly contributes in a major way to the general goal of enhancing Whānau Ora.

### **Has the issue/need/gap been addressed and if so, to what degree and how?**

At the simplest level, the Whānau Ora programme addresses the gap between the crisis which brings a woman and her children into Refuge and their re-establishment in the community. As shown in the cases studies, the specific needs to be addressed vary from whānau to whānau. Some of the specific needs which are addressed in the context of the Whānau Ora programme include relatively practical issues such as housing, income support and budgeting. Spiritual and psychological health are important: women and children may need help in recovering from trauma, dealing with anxiety, overcoming depression or conquering addictions. There are typically important issues of relational health such as strengthening the bond with children, parenting skills and reconnection with wider whānau. For some women, there are physical health issues to be addressed, especially those conditions which typically arise from exposure to violence such as fractures, dislocations, gynaecological problems, chronic pain and dental problems. For those women whose children have been taken into care, regaining the day-to-day care of their children is a priority.

Thus, it is important to understand the Whānau Ora Wellbeing programme as an *individualised* programme, the specifics of which vary from woman to woman, whānau to whānau. As one key informant told us, a strength of the programme is that “the intervention is based on what the family see for themselves, what the victim sees herself, and it’s built around that.”

It is also important to understand Whānau Ora as a *wrap-around* programme. This term often came up in our conversations with key informants. For example, a Police

Family Safety Team member commented on the value of the programme for “high risk, top-end families... who have needed that wrap-around, full-on intervention.” As can be seen from the case studies, an important part of the work of Te Whakaruruhau advocates is to mobilise community and institutional resources whānau need. One key informant used the image of the village to describe the way this is done. She said that one of strengths of the Whānau Ora approach is that

*It's more like the village concept... If the whole village is involved, the more support the individual has – or the individual whānau – the more likely they are to make some changes. The support needs to be ongoing. That's how I see Whānau Ora as a positive. And working with Refuge I've really seen them want to bring in other services to be involved.*

This all takes time. As the interviewee above noted, “The support needs to be ongoing.” A police interviewee emphasised that there are no “quick fixes.”

*These families that they're taking on, they're not quick fixes. (Refuge) have to be able to put that time and energy into them and actually work with them at their pace.*

And speaking from a more therapeutic perspective, a counsellor noted “trauma takes time and processing to heal. There's no (set) time that can gauge someone's healing from trauma.” Moreover, needs change over time. Another key informant nicely encapsulated the rationale for the programme.

*There's clearly different needs when you start at crisis (compared to) transitioning and eventually returning to the community, safe and ready to carry on their life away from the violence that brought them into it in the first place and each part of it takes longer and longer doesn't it? Because the crisis is or can be usually a fairly short period, whereas the sort of transition can take quite a long time.*

However, it would be a mistake to suggest that moving through transition is an unvarying, predictable sequence. While women and whānau typically have multiple needs, it is likely that at any one time, some needs will take priority over others and that priorities may change. A facilitator of women's empowerment groups told us that she often has women from Te Whakaruruhau in her groups. She described the way some women came to the programme for a while, left and came back again, depending on their “headspace”.

*It just depends on where they're at when they come here. If they're willing to take things on board they're here for a long while. If there's too much going on they're here for a little bit. They need to fix that (other) side first: the side that is the monies, the house, the family, the real basic needs. Once those... needs are met I find I'll get a call back saying, "Can I return?" So that's kind of how it's been working between us and Te Whakaruruhau.*

These comments tend to confirm one of things evident from the case studies: for many of the women it did indeed appear likely that there was “too much going on.” Their days were often built around appointments with various professionals (e.g.

social workers, lawyers, counsellors, Work and Income case managers), programme attendance and dealing with commercial services such as landlords, power companies and the like. Of course, alongside all of this they would be trying to care for their children, who typically, would be needing a lot of care and attention.

While the programme can be thought of as an individualised, wrap-around intervention that occurs over time, at the centre of it is the *relationship* between women and their advocate. As can be seen from the case studies, most of the women spoke very highly of their advocate. For example, Sophie was very clear about the crucial role of her advocate in enabling her to regain the care of her daughter: “if it wasn’t for (name) I wouldn’t have Sarah today.” Typical of women’s comments about the advocates is this one from Melissa, who thought the most important part of her time with Refuge was.

*Just their support. Telling me that I can go and do these types of things. Like at first, if I had an appointment, they’ll take me. They’d take me to all my appointments. But then after a while they, not telling me, but just making me think for myself. I don’t need to be taken. I can do these things on my own. Find my independence. They helped me to find my independence and go and do things.*

A key informant commented on the way advocates are

*... actively engaged with their clients on a daily basis – sometimes if they’re a little more independent – on a weekly basis. But they transition them to that. That’s a big difference to the way a government social service works with the people – compared to the Whānau Ora way – the way that Maori work with people.*

Moreover, the advocates seem never to give up. For example, Sophie had a “long history” with Refuge spanning two relationships but there was no suggestion that she was seen as being beyond help. As Sophie saw it, the advocates were “the only people that supported me... And they’ll be there when anything goes wrong...Anything. I just have to ring them.” The value of that kind of certainty should not be under-estimated.

We return to the role of advocates later. Specifically, we – and some of our key informants – have concerns about the heavy workload of advocates and the risks they face of burning out. But for the moment, it is worth reiterating that the programme addresses issues and needs in the lives of women and whānau through the provision of an *individualised, wrap-around* programme in which the crucial ingredient is the work of the *advocates* and their relationships with the women.

## **How has the target audience benefited from the implementation of the initiative?**

The case studies provide descriptions of some of the ways in which women and whānau have benefitted from the Whānau Ora Wellbeing programme. Looking across the case studies has enabled us to identify several broad categories of benefits. These are discussed below.

**Safety.** Ensuring women's safety is the first priority of Refuges. As May said, "I feel safe here" (at Refuge). Aroha finally slept well when she came into Refuge. While often understood as referring to safety from physical violence, Refuges also provide a place of psychological safety. That is, coming into Refuge provides a respite from the coercive control of the abuser and with it, the opportunity to re-evaluate one's experience. Our case study participants have talked about their safety in both the physical and psychological senses. For example, Melissa talked about Refuge as a safe base from which to interact with her partner. She could visit Tom with some confidence because he knows she now has options: "If I had nowhere to go, then he'd still be an egg." For some women, the refuge provided respite from not only an abusive partner but also family members who colluded with the abuse. This was the case for Rangimarie whose sister "nuttled out" because Rangimarie left Tem and went to Refuge. Coming to Refuge meant she was safe from unhelpful family "interference".

**Physical wellbeing.** Domestic violence has well-documented impacts on the physical wellbeing of women, both in terms of the direct effects of injuries and the indirect effect of continued exposure to stress and trauma. Although we did not set out to specifically assess changes in physical wellbeing, interviewers often commented after repeat visits how their interviewee "looked better" compared to their first meeting. For example, improved skin colour, better hair and brighter eyes drew comment. Harmony was significantly overweight and worn out when she came to Refuge. By the time of our last interview, she was "bouncy." Because of illness, May was significantly underweight when she came to Refuge but was much healthier a few months later. Sophie described herself as having become more "energetic."

**Psychological and spiritual wellbeing.** Women often talked about themselves as more relaxed and less stressed. For example, Harmony mentioned feeling "lighter", "more relaxed" and being able to "let things go." Women frequently talked about feeling emotionally stronger and more confident and assertive. Several women (e.g. Helen, Rangimarie, Harmony, Aroha, Deborah and Sophie) who had entered Refuge with significant substance abuse problems reported themselves as having got their drinking under control and/or being "clean" of drugs. Learning to deal with their anger was important for some. For example, completing an anger management course was an important part of the programme for Helen. Some women noted reduced symptoms associated with Post-Traumatic Stress, such as flash-backs, high anxiety and hyper-vigilance. Counselling and general life-style changes were often attributed as being behind such changes although for one woman, Harmony, being prescribed medication for her depression was an important step, at least in the short-term: she was later able to cope without medication.

**Economic wellbeing.** Domestic violence typically impoverishes women because abusers take their money and/or run up debts in their name. Rent arrears and unpaid bills for house repairs are a common challenge. Melissa and Rangimarie talked about the help they received in clearing debts. For some (e.g. Sophie and Harmony), finding a job made a big difference to their economic wellbeing. The provision of household goods and clothing was important here too, especially for those women – and children – who came into Refuge with little more than the clothes they wore. This sort of practical assistance was particularly important for Katz, Ataahua and Rangimarie.



**Children's wellbeing.** Women often commented on the wellbeing of their children. Indeed, concerns about their children's wellbeing were often to the fore in their decision to come to Refuge in the first place. For example, Ataahua came to Refuge after thinking about the effect of the violence on her daughter and worrying that she was "going to end up with a man who hits her." For Aroha, the impetus was seeing her children trying to defend her. Several women had had their children taken into CYF care (notably Helen, Deborah and Harmony). For them, regaining the day-to-day care of their children was the focus of their healing and recovery. In each of these cases, women were making considerable progress towards this goal. Other women commented on the way their children had settled since coming into Refuge. May, for example, was pleased with the way Omar was making friends. It was also clear that dealing with their own issues had meant that women were better placed to attend to the needs of their children. This was very evident in the progress Helen and Harmony are making towards regaining the day to day care of their children. For some, having the abuser out of their lives was seen as a distinct advantage as they re-established good relationships with their children. Here, parenting programmes helped. Sophie, for example, learnt a lot about attachment and Katz a lot about punishment.

**Positive changes in relationship with the abuser.** After coming into Refuge to get away from their abuser, at the time of writing, Helen and Harmony are living with their partner and feeling positive about the way the relationship has changed. On the other hand, other women did not want to have anything more to do with their abuser, even if he was the father of their children. However, the majority recognised that as the father of their children, the abuser was inevitably going to play some continuing role in their lives and the lives of their children. In some cases, this was welcomed. Ataahua wants Ron "to stay in the kid's lives" but she also wants him "to get his own place". Here, Ataahua can be seen to be setting out a particular version of Whānau ora in the context of domestic violence. That is, for some Whānau, the adult relationship may be so damaged that it is unrealistic and undesirable to resume an intimate live-in relationship. However, the well-being of the children and the maintenance of whakapapa links require that the adult relationship be addressed. This is an important contribution of the Whānau ora approach as practiced by Te Whakaruruhau. It is an approach which stands in stark contrast with the typical approach of "mainstream" Refuge practice which has focused exclusively on women and children.

Of itself, being in Refuge was sometimes talked about as helping women in their relationships with the abuser, providing a safe base from which to interact with him and a clear signal to the abuser that they had alternatives to staying with him. Melissa put it this way: Tom "would still be an egg" if she had had nowhere else to go. As the case studies show, there were a number of women whose partners had become engaged with the Whānau Ora programme (e.g. through participation in parenting programmes, couples counselling, stopping violence programmes or addictions counselling). Invariably, these women spoke really positively about the impact of such involvement on the abuser's behaviour and their relationship with him. For example, Helen appreciated the changes being made by Shaun.

**Social wellbeing.** Unsurprisingly, many of the women spoke about becoming isolated from Whānau and friends while they were in the relationship with the abuser prior to

coming into Refuge. Aroha had gone to some lengths to keep the abuse a secret from her family. An important part of the Whānau Ora Wellbeing programme was helping women re-establish a supportive network of relationships. Strengthening relationships with her own whānau was an important part of this for many women. Both Harmony and Katz, for example, had become estranged from their mothers: both were making significant progress in re-building those relationships, and breaking the “silence” meant Aroha could access whānau support. However, for some women, rebuilding whānau links was not a realistic goal, at least in the medium term: for them, whānau was either not safe, not accessible and/or the relationships were too damaged to be easily repaired. Instead, other groups took on a whānau-like role in the woman’s life. Church groups and the Refuge itself were important in this regard. This was certainly the case for Sophie: the only people who supported her while she was in labour were her advocates. Such supportive ties can continue well beyond leaving Refuge. Partly because they share the experience of surviving cancer, May has developed a rich friendship with a woman she first met in the role of advocate.

Our discussion of benefits so far has focused on women and children. However, as described earlier, as part of its general approach to Whānau Ora, Te Whakaruruhau has developed a close working relationship with the Te Ao Marama, the Māori Focus Unit at Waikeria Prison (see page 60). Our discussion of how the “target audience (has) benefited from the implementation of the initiative” would be incomplete if it did not specifically address the impact on the men from Waikeria who have become involved in Te Whakaruruhau.

In general terms, the exposure to the life and work of Refuge is, in the words of a prison officer, “quite humbling” for the inmates. For example, he told us about the impact on the men of working to repair damage caused in the context of violence. When asked what the men get out of it, he replied

*First and foremost... they see the damage they do. They do a huge amount of damage and a lot of them don't understand that. I would give you an example... My party went in and they fixed up the house. When they walked into the house there was blood all over the walls, kids clothing everywhere, there was still food on the table, there's holes in the walls, tagging everywhere... the house was just about completely stuffed. Anyway, they fixed it up and they got it back to how it was.*

While this sort of experience has a sobering effect, in this particular instance, there was a further development: namely, the house was again trashed by the partner some time later. The work party returned.

*One of the guys who had been in jail for a long, long time – he is actually doing preventative detention because of his violent offending – he nearly cried when he saw what actually happened. They went back to fix it up again and he was nearly crying when he was talking to me about it, because he didn't realise the damage that can happen in a very, very short period of time... and that's what they get out of it. They understand. Like we had (a Te Whakaruruhau staff member) came out and spoke to the guys in the unit the other day...and told them stories about the kinds of*

*things that they have to do and how they rely on Te Ao Marama guys to actually help them through the difficult places. It's quite humbling for them.*

Moreover, working with inmates was seen by some of our key informants as particularly productive because they are so receptive.

*A result of being incarcerated is that these guys that come out of prison – opposed to the partners that are still out in the community – these (prison) guys are open. The prison guys, they're like sponges. They're like ready to live or ready to soak up stuff. Whereas the ones out in the community who are still in crisis - they've still got that wall up, you know? So they haven't reached that point, the bottom, come out again and thought "I don't want to be here". Prisoners... they're pliable, you can mould them.*

Working with men in this way is innovative and runs counter to the general philosophy of women's Refuges. As a senior prison officer noted,

*Even now people just don't accept it. How can a women's Refuge be working with prisoners? But it's a really good concept because if you just treat the women and leave the men then you're going to keep doing the same things. Whereas if you're treating both of them and then bring them together well hopefully (they'll be going in the same direction).*

As noted in our Introduction, historically, accountability to whānau provided effective protection in relation to violence against women and children (see page 1). The relationship between Te Whakaruruhau and Te Ao Maramara has helped reinvigorate this protective role in at least two ways. Firstly, as the senior prison officer noted, for some men being released from prison, returning to their literal Whānau is not in their best interests, at least not in the short term. As he put it,

*To me from my point of view, from the prison side, seeing prisoners, Whānau can be either their very, very best friend or their worst enemies. And I tell you what... eighty five per cent of the time they will be your worst enemies.*

For men in the latter category, Te Whakaruruhau offers a substitute whānau. There have now been a number of men who, when released, have moved into accommodation arranged by Te Whakaruruhau. On the whole, such arrangements have worked well. In one of the more challenging cases, a parolee abandoned the arranged accommodation shortly after release to go live with his brother. However, this didn't work out.

*Of course he was getting further and further in debt. He started pleading with the Women's Refuge, who said no, no don't take him, and in the end they did and he's come right. He's doing really well, got all his dole and all that sorted. He's making a really good contribution to what they (Te Whakaruruhau) are doing too.*

The protective role of whānau has been enhanced in other ways. As could be expected, between them, Te Whakaruruhau staff have extensive whānau links throughout

Aotearoa. In some instances, those networks have been advised of the imminent release of an inmate. Mobilising whānau support and accountability in this way is likely to enhance reintegration into the community and reduce re-offending.

### Did the initiative achieve what it set out to do at the beginning?

In our view, there is a certain amount of overlap between this question and the question addressed in the previous section. That is, the benefits outlined above go some way towards addressing the question of the extent to which the programme achieved what it set out to do. However, in the interest of greater transparency, we think it may be useful to be more explicit in linking outcomes (or benefits) to the specific aims of the programme as they were stated in the *Whānau Ora Proposal* (Te Whakaruruhau, 2010, p.3). We do this in the form of a table (below) in which case-specific outcomes are placed alongside relevant aims.

**Table 1: Achievement of Aims**

Key Aim	Exemplars of achievement
Strengthening and rebuilding whānau relationships.	<p>Harmony and Katz are rebuilding the relationship with their mothers from whom they had become estranged.</p> <p>Helen and Harmony are re-establishing a healthy relationship with their respective partners.</p> <p>Sophie, Harmony, Rangimarie and Aroha now have some contact with their respective siblings and other Whānau members.</p> <p>Melissa no longer fears Tom and is more confident in dealing with him.</p> <p>May has established good friendships with others in her immigrant community.</p>
Improving Hauora for children through supporting their parents to create safe and happy homes.	<p>May's son is establishing healthy friendships.</p> <p>Helen is establishing a safe home with Shaun such that CYF are envisaging returning the children to their parents full-time.</p> <p>Deborah is likely to regain the care of her children.</p> <p>Sophie has regained custody of Sarah and dealing with attachment issues in a healthy manner.</p> <p>Things have progressed to the point where Harmony and Jim's children are spending time with them.</p> <p>Ataahua's eldest daughter has completed a programme for children exposed to domestic violence. The 3 children are "emotionally... happier".</p> <p>Aroha's children are settled and doing well at school.</p>

Developing strategies and plans that foster violence free homes.	<p>Parenting education and couples counselling have helped Helen and Shaun parent in a non-violent manner. Sophie has a better bond with Sarah such that she can now leave her at child care.</p> <p>Katz is learning non-violent ways of parenting Millie and of confronting her sons' violence.</p> <p>Ataahua has had "parental guidance help".</p> <p>Deborah has completed a parenting programme, an alcohol and drug programme and a women's empowerment programme.</p>
Advancing whānau ora and affirm positive Māori approaches that improve Māori health outcomes.	<p>Programme has led to a significant re-think within the local CYF office towards a more whānau-centred approach to child protection.</p> <p>Integration of inmates from Waikeria into Refuge activities has helped affirm healthy gender relationships.</p>
Promoting Māori service delivery systems that values health and social service integration and promote whānau centred interventions.	<p>The programme is based on the following foundational values: Whānaungatanga, manaakitanga and wairuatanga.</p> <p>CYF has been engaged in a Whānau-centred way of working.</p>
Identifying service models that are functional and that appropriately address the needs of whānau, hapū, Iwi and Māori communities.	<p>Te Whakaruruhau has become de facto the lead agency in an inter-agency response to domestic violence and child abuse which has whānau at its centre.</p>
Enhancing physical, spiritual, mental and emotional health, giving whānau control over their own destiny.	<p>May is fitter and is getting off antidepressants.</p> <p>Melissa is gaining confidence and can stand up for herself.</p> <p>Ataahua is more relaxed and more fit.</p> <p>Harmony, Rangimarie, Helen, Aroha, Deborah and Sophie are clean of drugs and/or have their alcohol problem under control.</p> <p>Harmony is no longer so highly anxious ("You know what I mean?")</p> <p>Helen and Shaun are now able to make good decisions for their whānau.</p> <p>May is studying and becoming more autonomous</p> <p>Sophie is less troubled by the symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome. She is able to support her whānau financially so that they are more in control of their destiny. She has become more "sociable, energetic."</p> <p>Aroha now has a job which ensures her whānau are better resourced to exercise control over their destiny.</p>

### Did the impact/outcome component of the evaluation demonstrate genuine change?

The sections above describe some of the outcomes for individual women and whānau. In this section, we address the way in which the Whānau Ora programme has had an impact at the institutional or agency level.

One of the well-documented problems in domestic violence and child abuse interventions is that they are commonly fragmented. For example, child protection work has often been carried out in isolation from advocacy for battered women, despite the huge overlap between the two (Murphy, Paton, Gulliver, & Fanslow, 2013b). Perpetrator programmes have often drawn criticism for a failure to work with – and be accountable to – women’s advocacy programmes (Gondolf, 2010). Child custody evaluators have often worked independently of batterer programmes. (For a recent overview of these issues, see (Murphy et al., 2013a)). An important institutional-level impact of the programme is that it has helped agencies, both government and non-government, work together.

This was a consistent theme in our conversations with key informants. For example, key informants within the Police described the way agencies are often reluctant to engage with whānau, focusing instead on the specific member or members for whom they are contracted to provide services. As one of our interviewees put it, if a broader approach is advocated, the response is commonly, “That’s not our role; that’s not our client.” Uniformly, key informants spoke warmly about the way Te Whakaruruhau had provided leadership in ensuring a seamless, wrap-around approach to whānau affected by domestic violence and child abuse.

Of course, the Whānau Ora Wellbeing programme is not the first attempt to provide coordinated interventions in domestic violence and child abuse (Murphy, Musser, & Maton, 1998). However, it may be relatively unusual in that, here, the coordination and leadership comes from a Māori agency. One of our key informant put it this way.

*Another strength is that it’s more like the village concept: the more people are involved – if the whole village is involved – the more support the individual has or the individual Whānau, the more likely they are to make some changes. The support needs to be ongoing. That’s how I see Whānau Ora as a positive. And working with Refuge I’ve really seen them work to bring other services to be actively involved. And it’s different.*

This key informant pointed out that “CYF kind of does that with their FGCs (Family Group Conferences) but not really.” The difference is.

*Refuge... They’re actively engaged with their clients on a daily basis – sometimes if they’re a little more independent, on a weekly basis. But they transition them to that. That’s a big difference to the way a government social service works with the people – compared to the Whānau Ora way that Maori work with people.*

Another key informant talked about the way working alongside Te Whakaruruhau under the Whānau Ora model had change the approach of other agencies.

*Whānau Ora, I believe, has widened everyone’s (understanding of the) scope and depth of what responding to Whānau means and in that sense that’s been a great thing.*

A good example of this comes from a Police interviewee.

*We are huge advocates of working with the whole family. Whether they're going to stay together or apart; either way, we need to work with the whole lot of them, and anyone who is around to support them as well, to try and move things onto a better space, my understanding is that one – that is pretty much what Whānau Ora is supposed to be doing.*

But perhaps the most dramatic change at the agency level has been with CYF. Historically, CYF has been reluctant to engage with offenders (Murphy et al., 2013a; Robertson et al., 2007). But according to a CYF social worker, because social workers have become much more closely involved in specific cases (see especially the case study Helen),

*There's been an absolute smack in the face revelation that you cannot tell people they can't be a couple, regardless of what we think about their welfare or not. And all that happens then is that people are more secretive and (because of that) they're more at risk.... (the programme has) led to a partnership between Te Whakaruruhau and ourselves, for the benefit of the children.*

As a consequence, CYF have engaged with Refuge in a much more intensive way. This has required a high level of honesty and trust.

*It's meant that we've had to sit around the table and we've had to agree to differ or agree on an alternative route at times, and that's been really beneficial. It's also taken a lot of work on both sides around the need to prepare to meet each other's expectations,*

But the effort is recognised as being worth it. As one social worker commented (in respect of Helen, Shaun and their children), "It's taken a lot of hard work... but that could be a life time's worth investment for this family."

It should be mentioned that increasing collaboration between agencies has been a major feature of family violence work in Aotearoa for well over twenty years. In some ways, the developments described above continue a well-established trend. However, it should also be observed that the Whānau Ora framework has made a distinct contribution. As a Te Whakaruruhau manager observed,

*Whānau Ora – the framework – allowed us to go to CYF and propose a programme with the whole family. Whereas prior to that – and it always has been and it still will be for a while – the programme would be with mum and the children only. And it still is like that but we've been able to make a small headway here and there and it's all because of the Whānau Ora concept that people have started to widen their perspective of what things needed to be done, how things can work.*

In terms of government policy, Whānau Ora is still in its relative infancy, but the comments reported here are suggestive of a significant shift in attitudes and understanding in meeting the needs of whānau.

## Were the objectives of the Fund met?

According to the Ministry,

The overall goal of the Fund is to advance whānau ora by affirming Māori approaches that improve Māori health outcomes. The whānau centered approach is focused on Whānau decision making and empowerment. (Ministry of Health, 2009a, p. 6)

There are six “key objectives” set out under this general goal statement. We have placed these in the left hand column of the table below, along with some summary statements about the way the Wellbeing Whānau Ora programme has contributed to their attainment.

**Table 2: Attainment of objectives of the fund**

Key objectives of the Fund	Evidence of attainment
Advance whānau ora and affirm positive Māori approaches that improve Māori health outcomes	The programme has contributed to whānau ora by facilitating the support necessary to allow whānau connections disrupted by (often intergenerational) domestic violence and child abuse to be re-invigorated. Somewhat paradoxically, this can sometimes first require a period of separation and rebuilding of individual health and well-being.
Promote Māori service delivery systems that values health and social service integration and employ Whānau centred interventions	The programme has been influential in leading government and other “mainstream” agencies towards adopting a whānau-focus for their interventions.
Recognise service models that address the needs of whānau, hapu, iwi and Māori communities	In contrast to fragmented approaches typical of interventions in domestic violence and child abuse, Te Whakaruruhau has promoted a whānau model which engages all members of the whānau with the aim of promoting safety and health.
Enhance physical, spiritual, mental and emotional health, giving whānau control over their own destinies	Case studies include references to enhanced physical and psychological health. Several whānau have had their children, previously in CYF care, returned to them.
Support the ongoing contribution of rongoa Māori to Māori health and wellbeing through improved sustainability of rongoa resources and health practices	
Recognise and value Māori models of health and traditional healing	Use of Maori models of health evident in various programme activities, especially those focused on healing from the hurt of domestic violence and child abuse.

## What lessons were learnt during the implementation of the initiative?

### *Child protection can be enhanced by working with perpetrators*

As we mentioned earlier, one of the significant challenges in family violence policy and practice is a common tendency for domestic violence interventions and child protection interventions to operate in substantially separate, isolated silos. This is



despite the growing evidence of the huge overlap between domestic violence and child abuse.

Estimates vary but it is clear that at least half the children living in homes in which there is domestic violence are directly, physically abused themselves. Moreover, even if they are not actually hit, children who witness domestic violence face risks of negative outcomes substantially the same as those who are physically abused. When thought of in this way, domestic violence against a mother, almost by definition, constitutes abuse of the child, an overlap of 100%. (See Murphy et al. (2013b) for a full discussion.)

When viewed in other direction, the overlap is not so high but it is still very significant. We can find no local studies on the proportion of children identified as being abused who are also exposed to domestic violence. However, Australian data suggests that between a half and two thirds of statutory child protection cases also involve domestic violence (Humphreys, 2007). In New Zealand, two thirds of notifications to CYF are believed to involve domestic violence (Nixon, 2012). In other words, domestic violence is the most common context in which child abuse occurs.

The extent to which domestic violence is implicated in child abuse raises profound issues for child protection work. One of these, put simply, is that all things being equal, the best way of keeping children safe is to help mothers be safe (Murphy et al., 2013a). However, as some of our key informants told us, what has often happened is that women are given an ultimatum: leave the perpetrator or face having your child(ren) taken into care. Indeed, this is what happened (initially at least) with in two of our case studies (Helen, Harmony). However, such ultimatums may alienate the protective parent and/or force her to conceal the real state of the relationship (Harmony).

The Whānau Ora programme has provided an opportunity for a different approach, one that recognises, in the words of a social worker, “That you cannot tell people that they cannot be a couple.” That is, it may be more productive to engage with the perpetrator, exemplified in the case study of Helen (see page 14). This is a significant departure for CYF. As a social worker said,

*It's a change for us to be involved in a programme which is to work with the perpetrator as well as the victim and the children... I see it as advantage given that women often don't stay away from the perpetrator, regardless of how many programmes they've been through or participated in. And that if we have a programme that comes to some understanding of the male and the female involved agreeing to be safe and behave well around their children, whether they're living in a relationship or apart, then that's a benefit to the children.*

We think it is difficult to over-estimate what a profound shift this represents in the approach of CYF. As another social worker told us,

*I have to say the taking on board of working with men is one of the most positive steps I have seen... It's encouraged us now to be more*

*collaborative in our approach with Whakaruruhau. Because once upon a time it was the men who were just left out to the side, and 90% of the time, when you watch the interaction between the men and the women, it's like both need help. It's not just one of yous, so that was really encouraging. To me that's really positive... Contributing to Whānau Ora – well to me, that's big...*

Such close collaboration did not come without some tension. For example, in one case (see case study Helen, page 14), implementing the plan was delayed by discussions about funding and by the need for more extensive documentation than was first provided. But as the social workers we interviewed saw it, these are problems to be worked through and not reasons for abandoning this more positive approach.

### *The value of working with men in accountable ways*

Internationally, a family systems approach to domestic violence has often been criticised as being deeply flawed, often sacrificing women's safety and autonomy in a misguided attempt to prioritise the maintenance (or re-establishment) of the nuclear family unit. For example, such approaches often emphasize couples counselling. As various researchers have pointed out, couples counselling re-conceptualises men's violence towards women as a communication problem, downplaying the power and control dynamics intrinsic to domestic violence and failing to understand the often subtle ways violent men can coerce their partners (Bograd & Mederos, 1999). Counselling can put battered women in an invidious situation. Frank disclosure of the violence can risk retribution from the abuser: failing to disclose the nature and the extent of the violence will almost certainly mean that it will not be addressed.

On the other hand, in many indigenous cultures, restorative approaches which involve perpetrators are often favoured. As various authors have argued, such approaches need not sacrifice the safety of women and children and can be effective in holding perpetrators accountable for their violence (e.g. Coker, 2006; Zellerer, 1999).

In our view, the Whānau Ora programme shows considerable promise in this regard. We agree with a Police Officer who told us

*That's what I like about where Refuge have come from in their dealings with the offender at this stage. It's like "Yes we will help you. Yes we will support you. But, you've done wrong and you need to be held accountable for that."*

Another key informant put it this way.

*That's Whānau Ora – getting in there and working not only with the victims of the violence but the source of the violence because they are Whānau, they're partners, they're husbands, they're brothers. Whānau Ora stands not only for healthy Whānau, but also trying to give wellness to Whānau who haven't had that.*

But as she pointed out, to do this safely requires clear thinking about the importance of holding perpetrators accountable for their violence.

*Not all people in social service agencies understand domestic violence. Perpetrators aren't held accountable for their behaviour and when I say that (accountability) people cringe because they think only of people who (wag a) finger in (the man's) face and say "Bad person". When actually, it's about "Let's take a look at you in a holistic way and see what's missing and what you need to put yourself in order".*

### **Staff workloads are (probably) unsustainably high**

As the case studies show, the women we interviewed, almost without exception, spoke very highly of the work of the advocates. Typically, women attributed a lot of the credit for the progress they made to the relationship with their advocate. Advocates were described as being “awesome” and (almost) always available. This was echoed in the key informant interviews. For example, a social worker commented

*The strength of this programme would have to be the commitment of the staff at Te Whakaruruhau... They work like a Whānau themselves. For me, it wasn't a hard concept to grasp that this is how they work.*

But such admiration for the advocates was often matched by concerns about their welfare. This was particularly the case for those key informants who work most closely with Te Whakaruruhau. They drew attention to the high caseloads advocates carried by the advocates and who expressed real concern about the risk of burnout. A social worker commented

*I'm often concerned that they may burn themselves out. I've seen people working huge hours, just being available almost round the clock to meet people's needs and I don't know how they continue to be able to do that. I have concerns for people's own wellbeing and health around that.*

Such comments accord with our own observations. Our interviewers routinely commented on how busy the advocates were. One marker of this was that we found it impossible to get all the relevant advocates together at once: invariably there would be an urgent matter one or more of them would need to attend to. Having to respond to urgent needs so frequently is a recipe for burnout.

### **Engaging wider whānau is a challenge in the context of domestic violence**

As mentioned earlier (see page 59), almost by definition, women who enter the Whānau Ora Wellbeing programme have limited whānau support. If it were otherwise, they are either unlikely to need to come into the safe house or if they did, are likely to have returned to whānau after a short stay. From the beginning, Te Whakaruruhau managers had realistic expectations about the challenges of mobilising wider whānau support for women in the programme. For many women who enter Refuge, the reality is that the wider whānau is not a safe place, at least in the short to medium term. This is not to say that strengthening the wider whānau is a lost cause (for example, see case study Harmony). Indeed, as one of the managers told us, breaking the cycle of violence *requires* working with the collective.

*The position and status of woman and children is dependent on the whānau... and if we're real about community responses, then how do we*

*educate them? How do we get the community to respond in appropriate ways? Like you involve them. You break that isolation. You bring them to the table. You plan with them. You get their buy in.*

The point we wish to make here is that achieving that broader vision takes time. It is important that decision makers do not have unrealistic expectations of what it takes to achieve it in the context of domestic violence. The point was made to us that to successfully engage the wider whānau in domestic violence interventions is likely to take rather longer than interventions addressing other challenges facing whānau such as poverty or ill-health. In the case of domestic violence,

*There's a lot of work that needs to be done with the Whānau themselves to build their capacity and capability to be able to awhi their Whānau member well (Te Whakaruruhau manager).*

### ***Housing is a continuing challenge***

Homelessness is a major challenge for women escaping a violent relationship. For many, returning to the family home is not a safe option, despite the remedies available under the Domestic Violence Act (protection orders, occupation orders, and tenancy orders). Because of the financial abuse and exploitation of the perpetrator, women are often left with rent arrears. If they have been the principal tenant, they may be liable for the damage the perpetrator has caused. For these sorts of reasons, advocates told us, women are often effectively black-listed by rental agencies and Housing New Zealand.

Advocates told us that finding housing for women is very hard. Women are often on Housing New Zealand waiting lists for a very long time. Some (like Harmony), give up and “go private”, despite the higher rents they face. The fact that most interactions with Housing New Zealand are now via a 0800 line makes dealing with housing issues significantly harder.

In our view, the lack of affordable, quality housing remains a major barrier for women seeking to re-establish themselves in the community. Addressing the need for housing requires resources beyond those available to most women or their Whānau. If the vision of Whānau Ora is to be achieved, a much higher priority needs to be placed on the provision of affordable, quality housing.

### **Did the initiative represent value for money?**

A formal cost benefit analysis was beyond the scope of this evaluation. However, we can report that a consistent theme in key informant interviews was admiration for what is being achieved in the programme compared to the resources being expended. For example, reflecting on a particular case study, a senior social worker commented,

*If I was reporting back to the funding sources for Whānau Ora around is their money being well spent? I would say in this particular family that it has been well spent, and that the concept has been applied well... they may go on to not need us or Whakaruruhau involved in the future, and those little kids may very well be raised by their mum and their dad.*

Asked for a final comment on the Whānau Ora programme, another key informant said,

*Well just that it's a good programme but they're a bit short on the ground with people. Because people means resources, and that's always been a problem. Especially Maori organisations have always been under resourced, that's no surprise. But yet they're doing a lot of work with mainstream services and taking a lot of the overload off other community agencies.*

### **What is the viability of sharing and spreading the model?**

The people we spoke to, clients, staff and key informants alike, were very positive about the Whānau Ora model as it has been developed within Te Whakaruruhau. Good news travels fast. To some extent, the model is already being shared. A social worker noted

*What we've done working together is the promise of something pretty good that can be offered to lots of families... women, victims, as well as the perpetrators that other areas are hearing about it and... other areas are wanting to send their large and difficult families into the Waikato to come and have the benefit of the programme.*

However, such enthusiasm for the model was generally tempered by significant caveats.

Firstly, one of the keys to working effectively with the model has been strong interagency relationships. Mobilising the sort of wrap-around support that is central to the Whānau Ora approach requires honest and open communication. It requires a commitment to work through tough issues of funding and accountability. This has been particularly evident in the relationship with CYF. According to a social worker, these things worked because “We’ve had history with them (Te Whakaruruhau) in the past.” The logical conclusion is that it might be unwise to move towards Whānau Ora approaches in domestic violence and child abuse unless there is a good foundation of robust interagency relationships.

Secondly, there is the personal factor. Key informants pointed out the important role the leadership of Te Whakaruruhau play in ensuring the effectiveness of the programme. A prison officer commented

*It's a model that could be developed elsewhere but you would need to have people as committed as Roni and Ard. Because they deal with situations where people are at risk all the time; they understand the risk that's being run by doing this. They can manage it themselves. They don't need any interference from me or my brothers or anything like that, because they just 99% of the time they just click. To develop it in other places, you'd need to have people that have got the vision to start with*

The personal factor goes beyond the leadership. As mentioned above, one of the identified strengths of the programme is the commitment of the staff at Te Whakaruruhau. As one key informant put it, the Whānau Ora Wellbeing programme

“could be packaged and sold to other areas but the people at Whakaruruhau here is what makes the programme work.” That is, without strong leadership and skilled and committed staff, extension of the model may be ill advised.

A third, related, caveat is the need for the specialist knowledge and skills needed to work safely and effectively in domestic violence and child abuse. This is specialist work. Effective workers have a thorough knowledge of the dynamics of abuse. They have reflected on issues of violence and abuse in their own lives. They have well-developed antennae attuned to the minimisations, justifications and blaming which typically feature in the accounts of violence, not only from perpetrators but also from victims. They are able to conduct sound risk assessments. They understand safety planning. If they are working with victims, they need to understand how to best support them. If they are working with perpetrators, they need to be skilled in the art of compassionate confrontation (Rasanen, Holma, & Seikkula, 2012).

As long as these caveats are addressed, we think that the model could indeed be “shared” with and “spread” to other communities.

## **5: Conclusions**

From some perspectives, the Whānau Ora Wellbeing programme is a revolutionary development in the work of women’s Refuges. As some of our key informants noted, even a few years ago, the suggestion that Refuges would be engaged with perpetrators of domestic violence and child abuse would have been met with incredulity.

But from the perspective of Te Whakaruruhau, Whānau Ora was a logical extension of what they have been doing for three decades: that is, advocating for the safety and autonomy of women and children within the context in which they live their lives. Not surprisingly, the initially focus was on the provision of safe housing. The immediate priority was physical safety. But as the service developed, other challenges facing women were addressed. These included the need for advocacy within the systems which ostensibly had a role in protecting women and children from violence and abuse. These included the criminal justice system, the Family Court, the child protection system (CYF), health, income support and housing. Having established a strong record of advocacy for women and children in respect of such “systems”, it was a relatively short step to move to advocate for women and children within the context of whānau, hapū and iwi.

Not that this move was made without misgivings. In one of our conversations with Te Whakaruruhau managers, it was recalled that in early discussions about the concept, it was widely believed that whānau approaches would never work in relation to domestic violence (for all the reasons previously canvassed). However, there were other considerations. Firstly, it was evident that relying solely on agents of the Crown was never going to be enough to assure the safety and wellbeing of women and children. That is, despite some significant gains (e.g. the Police pro-arrest policy, the Domestic Violence Act, interagency collaborations etc), these systems continued to expose many women and children to continued abuse. Too often, such systems prioritise system goals (e.g. obtaining convictions; resolving notifications; closing

cases) over the aspirations of women and their whānau. They were, in the words of one of our key informants, just “another oppressive tool.” In contrast, working with whānau has opened new possibilities.

*What we’ve come to realise is with the right model and supports and resources in place there’s a chance we could get some really good outcomes. Without it, we’re going round in circles like we do and then government will dream up something else in three year’s time, and we’re all aligned to that and then that’s the cycle of governments.*

In other words, for Te Whakaruruhau, Whānau Ora has offered the prospect of moving beyond simply responding to the priorities of successive government policies. It provides an opportunity to work in a more transformative way. It offers the prospect of no longer being limited to pulling babies out of the proverbial river.

*So not only are we the ones getting the babies out of the water - that’s (still) part of our role... we’re also now looking at who’s throwing those babies in the water and bringing them closer to the table and saying “We need you to stop. How can we support you to change this?”*

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