

The Advocate

Many firsts for new Minister of Women's Affairs

Given the recent change in Government, *The Advocate* asked the Minister of Women's Affairs, the Hon. Pansy Wong to introduce herself.

I have been a Cabinet Minister for three months now, but my political career stretches back 20 years, starting off as a Canterbury Regional Councillor in 1989. When I entered Parliament in 1996, as a National List MP, I also became New Zealand's first MP of Asian ethnicity. In 2008, I became the first Asian to win an electorate seat when I became Member of Parliament for Botany. Following last year's elections, I became our country's first Asian Cabinet Minister. I am Minister for Ethnic Affairs and Women's Affairs, and Associate Minister for ACC, and Energy and Resources.

I am delighted to be Minister of Women's Affairs. I have strong ideas about what I would like to see in the future for all New Zealand women. I want to work at removing the barriers in women's lives that hinder or prevent them from being able to exercise their choices and from contributing fully to society and the economy. None of this can happen though unless women are healthy and safe in their homes and communities.

Christchurch Women's Refuge, of course, does not need to be told the statistics. For over 35 years they have worked tirelessly sheltering thousands of women and children, helping them put their lives back together and advocating on their behalf. You know, as well as I do, that we will not eliminate violence against women until people's attitudes and behaviours change. Ultimately, it is society that needs to endorse the attitude that violence against women will not be tolerated. I, and many others, have a sense this is now happening, thanks in no small part to organisations like Christchurch Women's Refuge.



The Hon. Pansy Wong

Government has a part to play in this also, and we will work to ensure we do what we can to eliminate violence against women.

In December 2008, Government introduced the Domestic Violence (Enhancing Safety) Bill, which aims to strengthen domestic violence legislation. The Bill proposes that police will be able to introduce 'on-the-spot protection orders' so victims are protected and supported, without having to wait for a court order.

I congratulate Christchurch Women's Refuge on its plans for the future which include piloting a resource in workplaces, and taking the message about domestic violence into schools. I wish you well for your proposed Domestic Violence Prevention Centre.

I also thank you and all the refuges around New Zealand for the immeasurable contribution you make and for your efforts to change New Zealanders' attitude towards violence.

I look forward to working with Women's Refuge in shaping a future where women are no longer fearful in their communities and their own homes – a place where they should always feel safe. I mean all women, of all ethnic groups, from all parts of New Zealand and of all ages.

1 March 2009



2009 is shaping up to be a year marked by uncertainty. On the positive side, economic change can, for some, lead to new beginnings, new ventures, new political forces and more active and healthy lifestyles. However for many it will mean long-term unemployment. The Government is currently predicting the number of unemployed to increase to around 7.5 percent, nearly double the current rate in Canterbury.

International studies show that when unemployment rises it has grave repercussions for families. According to a 2004 study by the United States National Institute of Justice, women whose male partners experienced two or more periods of unemployment over the five years of study were three times more likely to be abused.

You may be aware the new Government, as part of its 100-day plan, introduced into Parliament a law change aimed at protecting victims of domestic abuse. If passed, police will be able to issue an order requiring a person to stay away from a house for up to five days, and prohibit them from entering the home or trying to contact the person at risk. The new power will supersede any court orders allowing access to children for the period it lasts, and an order can be made even if the potential victim objects to it.

The Law Commission has been studying the proposal and earlier this month its report was leaked to media. The Commission questions the need to change the law because the proposed threshold for issuing on-the-spot orders is very close to that of arrest. It also recommended provision for urgent applications to set aside or to appeal such orders. The Commission's report claims the five-day period is difficult to justify, especially because of the serious consequences of such an order. The paper argues orders should last only for the time required to apply for a more authoritative Family Court protection order – usually the next day, or two days at a weekend.

Christchurch Women's Refuge is concerned the Law Commission appears focused on the rights of the alleged perpetrator of the law, and not on the rights of the alleged victim and their children. The proposed law change is designed to better protect society's most vulnerable by giving police another tool to combat violence. I can only hope MPs will see the Law Commission's recommendations for what they are – a means for the perpetrators of violence to continue inflicting abuse.

Recently I invited the five members of the Law Commission to come and see first-hand why police need this extra tool and why families need a minimum of five days protection whether they want it or not.

Public submissions on the bill closed on 27 February. However you can still have your say by emailing your MP and calling on them to support the passing of this important piece of legislation before the hard realities of the recession hit home.

Annette Gillespie
Manager
Christchurch Women's Refuge



Did you know?

An Australian study found that for women aged between 15 and 44, domestic violence was the leading contributor to death, disability and illness making more of a disease burden than high blood pressure, smoking and obesity (VicHealth, 2004).

Surviving the holidays

For three weeks over the festive season, skeleton staff ran Christchurch Women's Refuge (CWR). The core group of experienced people was led by Child and Youth Services team leader Lyn Boyd and Chris, CWR's Women's Services Team Leader. Lyn says unfortunately every year the holiday period becomes busier and busier.

Throughout the period the Safe House was full, with up to five adults and nine children at any one time. "We kept in constant contact with Christchurch's three other refuges and between us we managed crisis accommodation," says Lyn. "Sometimes we had to move families to other Refuges or accept families from other Refuges when it was not safe for a family to remain in a certain part of town."

Lyn says there are a number of reasons why Christmas and New Year are particularly busy. "People spend a lot more time together during holiday periods, they're in confined spaces and the weather is usually hot." However she says this is not an excuse as "only those people who solve problems with violence resort to violence".

CWR staff dealt with half a dozen incidents that occurred during crossover periods. A crossover period is when separated parents meet to exchange care of children. Three of these incidents involved physical attacks in front of children, the others involved verbal and psychological attacks.



This year Lyn says more mums rang in with concerns about separated partners turning up out of the blue. "During holidays some people feel they have a right to turn up at their ex-partner's house to spend time with the children outside of the court appointed time," she says. "Some of the men involved had protection orders against them preventing them from contacting their ex-partner and/or the children."

Eight women approached CWR and asked for assistance to obtain protection orders. "Given we had a skeleton staff, and the work involved in processing a protection order, we had to approach the Family Court Coordinators for assistance."

The crisis line, through which the majority of CWR's crisis and support work is carried out, was very busy throughout the period. Lyn says CWR hears increasingly from families suffering financial stress.

Many generous donations from individuals, groups and companies made the festive season much easier. "We received good quality presents that went to children who would otherwise not have had a Christmas," says Lyn.

Many tourism-based companies supplied passes to various attractions and movies, which were greatly appreciated. "Being cooped up in the Safe House over the festive season is not fun for children. These passes gave them a sense of normality for a couple of hours, during a difficult period in their lives," says Lyn.

According to Lynn, while running CWR over the festive season is demanding, the team did a fantastic job. "We managed to house everyone who needed to be, and we contacted every single police referral within 12 hours of notification. By the time the rest of the team returned from holiday their appointment books were full."

Supporting those who support others

There are many ways you can support Christchurch Women's Refuge. *The Advocate* wishes to thank everyone who has donated and would like to make special note of the following three businesses.

Contract Logistics: Staff at Contract Logistics in Hillsborough collected the most Christmas presents for charity in a company-wide competition. The presents weighed a total of 2500 kilograms and earned the Christchurch branch a \$500 cheque to give to its chosen charity, Christchurch Women's Refuge.

Contract Logistics, 8 Kennedy Place, Hillsborough or call 331 7345.

Drifters Inn: For the past eight months Kate and Steve Poiner from the Drifters Inn in Hanmer have supported victims of abuse

by providing them and their families with accommodation, passes to events and travel assistance.

Visit www.driftersinn.co.nz or call 0800 DRIFTERS

McKenzie & Willis: Prior to Christmas, Ann North nee Willis of McKenzie & Willis retired. In lieu of a farewell present Ann asked if the company could gift presents to Christchurch Women's Refuge. Just under 80 presents were collected for people in need.

Visit www.mckenzieandwillis.co.nz or call 0800 888 999

A special story

Christmas for those living with the realities of domestic violence was made a little more special by the actions of a young lad from North Canterbury.

Ten year-old Fynn McRobb from Oxford Area School arrived home one day with a mission in the form of homework. Each student in his year was asked to create a project that helped others.

Mum, Rachel McRobb, says they talked it over as a family and decided on adapting their usual Christmas tradition which is buying presents for underprivileged kids who have Christmas at the City Mission.

Fynn and his mum approached Deputy Principal Jen Rodgers to ask if Fynn could start an appeal through the school. Jen agreed and suggested the presents be given to Christchurch Women's Refuge for distribution.

Fynn and his younger sisters found an old Christmas tree in the cupboard and took it to school where it was set up in the foyer.

They created a flyer and sent it around the school asking for presents and the community responded. Two weeks later they had 67 presents under the tree. "I didn't think we'd get many, but we got a lot," says Fynn. Of the 67 presents five were bought by Fynn and his sisters with money given to them by family members.

Chris, Christchurch Women's Refuge Women's Services Team Leader says they have received donations from schools before but it's never been organised by a primary school student. "I think children have become more aware as to what happens in their community partly because of the 'It's Not Okay' advertising campaign.

"They were good quality presents and beautifully wrapped.

"We delivered them along with other presents to all our community clients and those living in the Safe House. These are children who would otherwise not have received presents or



Fynn McRobb

even had extra food at Christmas."

Fynn "got dragged up in Assembly, he doesn't like the limelight," says Rachel. However Fynn says it wasn't too bad and most importantly he says "it feels pretty good".

Deputy principal Jen Rodgers says "I'm really, really proud of Fynn. It's given his classmates a boost as well as shown them what they can achieve."



Join the journey to a violence free society

Charities Commission Number CC 30026

Do we have your correct details?

Please phone Derek on 353 7403 or email derek@womensrefuge.co.nz

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms/Other _____

Name _____

Address _____

Here is my donation of \$75 \$150 \$25 \$200

Other amount (please enter) \$ _____

Cheque payable to Christchurch Women's Refuge

Or charge my Visa MasterCard Expiry date ____ / ____

Card No.

Name of cardholder _____

Please send me information about making a gift to Christchurch Women's Refuge in my will.

Please post to:

Christchurch Women's Refuge Inc., PO Box 32 034, Christchurch 8147

Automatic payments can be set up by visiting www.womensrefuge.co.nz or by contacting Derek Dean 353 7403, derek@womensrefuge.co.nz

Thank you! We will send you a receipt