

Christchurch Women's Refuge

15 September 2009

MEDIA RELEASE

IT'S NOT OK: WEATHERSTON SENTENCING SENDS CLEAR MESSAGE ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The sentencing of Clayton Weatherston today to an eighteen-year prison sentence sends a clear message to perpetrators and the community that domestic violence is not OK says Christchurch Women's Refuge Chief Executive Officer Annette Gillespie.

"It's a message we have been sending for many years, but it hasn't always been reinforced by our legal system. Today's sentencing with its minimum non-parole period of eighteen years showed that finally the message is getting through. It is just tragic that it took the death of another woman to get that message heard."

Domestic violence is still endemic in New Zealand society and the number of women and children affected is not declining. In the 2007-08 year Christchurch Women's Refuge alone supported over 800 women and children through their services and programmes, and over 120 of those required accommodation in the Refuge's Safe House.

The Weatherston trial brought a lot of attention to the nature of violent and abusive relationships, although much of the discussion has implied that Weatherston was somehow unique as a character and killer. "Don't be fooled" says Gillespie. "People have stereotypes about domestic abuse – about how it happens and who perpetrates it – but this was clearly an abusive relationship. The pattern of behaviour is the same as in the many abusive relationships we deal with daily at Women's Refuge. Abuse can be emotional, verbal, sexual, physical – ultimately it's all about control. The difference in Weatherston's case was that this time he took it to the limit.

Christchurch has been home to many well publicised episodes of domestic violence recently. "This is proof of what we at refuge have known all along – domestic violence is still a major and never-ending problem in our community" says Gillespie. "We need to address this issue as a society. If we can engender a shift in our

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community's covert acceptance of domestic abuse as a 'private' issue which doesn't affect 'us', then we will finally be creating a society where people like Sophie Elliott get to live the lives they deserve."

To help engender that societal change Christchurch Women's Refuge is spearheading the establishment of a new National Centre for the Prevention of Family Violence, which it hopes will be operational by 2012. The Centre would offer comprehensive family violence related services and facilities and finally bring family violence out from behind closed doors.

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Facts About Christchurch Women's Refuge

Christchurch Women's Refuge is the first Refuge established in New Zealand (1973) and the first established outside the United Kingdom.

Christchurch Women's Refuge offers its services from south of Kaikoura through to Ashburton - a total population of approximately 400,000 people. It has a rural office in Rangiora.

It's services include:

- 24-hour crisis line
- Emergency safe house accommodation
- Separate group programmes for women and children
- Individual counseling sessions
- Advocacy services
- Community education

Many women contact Christchurch Women's Refuge directly. However, Christchurch Women's Refuge also proactively contacts many more named on Police Reports of Family Violence.

Key Statistics

In the year 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008 Christchurch Women's Refuge:

- responded to over 3100 calls on our Crisis and Support line
- assisted 59 women and 65 children with safe accommodation in our Residential Safe House for a total of 1248 bednights.
- worked with 347 women and 452 children through our community-based services (group and individual)
- provided approved Ministry of Justice education and safety programmes. We are also a Child, Youth and Family approved provider.
- proactively contacted more than 2000 women named in Police Reports of Family Violence to ensure their safety and that of their children.