

Christchurch Women's Refuge

For Release Monday 18 July

MEDIA RELEASE

Rebuilding Families Business-as-Usual for Local Refuge

As it launches its annual appeal week Christchurch Women's Refuge is busier than usual doing business as usual – helping to rebuild Canterbury families.

CEO Nicola Woodward says “Over the past 10 months many organisations and services have switched from ‘business as usual’ to ‘earthquake response’ to meet the more different and varied needs of families and communities affected by the quakes. However, for family violence services, earthquake response *is* business usual – there’s just more of it and it’s much more intense.”

Family violence is known to escalate following natural disasters. According to Police statistics, Canterbury recorded the second highest increase in reported family violence in the country (18.3%) in 2010, thanks in part to the September earthquake. “It’s not just our houses, businesses and roads that have been broken, it’s our families and communities too” says Woodward.

“If we talk about people feeling isolated, frightened, worried about the safety of their children, about not being able to cope financially, uncertain about what tomorrow will bring after another sleepless night, you might think I’m talking about what most of us have experienced since the earthquakes began. But I’m actually describing what it feels like to live with the effects of family violence. Combine the effects of these two enormous traumas together and you double the impact, double the damage, double the disaster” Woodward says.

Christchurch Women's Refuge has become increasingly busy after each quake, and two of the most notable increases in service need have been referrals from police (POL 400s, which have also shown a significant increase in the severity of violence) and assistance in seeking Protection Orders. “It seems that although our Safe Houses are all full, many women are reluctant to leave a violent relationship when life outside the home seems just as uncertain and unsafe.”

Worldwide evidence and Christchurch Women's Refuge’s own post-September experience indicates a peak in demand approximately six months on from a major disaster, and Christchurch Women's Refuge is now moving into that peak period. Woodward explains that “women who had returned to abusive relationships because they might have lost their home, their job, or were overwhelmed, are now re-engaging with our service. We’re seeing more young women - perhaps because their usual family supports are less resilient or available – and, most significantly, we’ve seen reported family violence in rural areas escalate dramatically as a result of population redistribution.”

In April Christchurch Women's Refuge engaged a second worker to support the growing number of new clients in their rural Rangiora-based service. “If we had the money, we’d also employ two additional workers in our city service” says Woodward.

Christchurch Women's Refuge currently has two staff that are part of the region’s earthquake support team (Stronger Canterbury), visiting and offering general support to earthquake affected families. This has allowed the agency to see the often hidden face of family violence. “As a result” says Woodward, “we’ve started to connect with vulnerable women and children who might not otherwise have come to our attention. We estimate there are many more families, behind closed doors, that are affected by family violence that we need to connect with.”

Christchurch Women's Refuge

"Everything we know tells us that this increased need for our services is not going to settle as quickly as the quakes. Many families are going to be feeling anxious, isolated, uncertain and powerless for some years to come. As long as that is the case, rates of family violence in Canterbury will remain high."

Patron Mayoress Jo Nicholls – Parker says she has "seen the physical devastation caused by the earthquakes, but I'm also very aware that the extreme stress and anxiety they've caused has affected the level of family violence across our city. As Patron, I'm reassured that Christchurch Women's Refuge is there to support those families to recover and rebuild themselves."

For any concerns related to family violence, please call our 24-hour free-phone 0800 1 REFUGE (0800 1 733 843)

--ENDS--

For further information contact:

Nicola Woodward
Chief Executive Officer
M: 027 245 0255
T: (03) 353 7400

Christchurch Women's Refuge Annual Appeal

- Runs 18-24 July.
- A street appeal will take place in Christchurch city, Kaiapoi, Rangiora and Rolleston.
- Text 'HOPE' to 3622 to make an instant \$3 donation, or donate online at womensrefuge.co.nz
- People can also support the 'Sow a Seedling of Hope' fundraising campaign via the website

Sow a Seedling of Hope Photo Opportunity:

To represent the 300 people killed by family members since 2000 Christchurch Women's Refuge is offering 300 seedlings for purchase, minimum \$10 each. They can be taken to homes, businesses etc or donated to a community planting to be nurtured and turned into symbols of hope and possibility.

On Friday 16 July we will have the seedlings and Christchurch Women's Refuge staff arranged to form a 'NO!' message as a photo opportunity in support of our appeal.

Date: Friday 16 July

Location: Trees for Canterbury nursery, 42 Charlesworth St, Woolston.

Time: 11am – 11:30am.

*****NB Separate Fact Sheet Attached*****