

For Immediate Release

MEDIA RELEASE

Christchurch Agency Featured as Change Maker on Family Violence Scene

Christchurch charity Aviva's innovative approach to family violence has led to it being featured as one of three agencies in the country to be highlighted in the Glenn Inquiry's 'Stories of Change' (released today).

Aviva (formerly Christchurch Women's Refuge) adopted a new strategic direction in late 2011, based on their inherent belief in everyone's potential to lead their own positive journey of change. "Essentially we've been looking at new and improved ways to overcome the growing problem of family violence in New Zealand, our most significant human rights issue" says CEO Nicola Woodward. "We recognised that, whilst our traditional approach enabled women and children to become safe we weren't fundamentally changing the landscape and that, until we did so, we'd remain an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff."

Working in a post-earthquake environment brought new demands but also provided Aviva with an exceptional opportunity to do things differently. "Business as usual simply wasn't an option" Woodward says. "Like other sectors in Christchurch over the past few years, we started to think outside the box, because we had to consider how we could better support individuals and families to overcome the multiple traumas caused not only by family violence but also the earthquakes and their aftermath."

With a firm belief that the support the agency offered needed to not only advocate social justice and inclusion, but practically support people to achieve these, Aviva have adapted their services around the principle that home should be our safest place. "This has essentially turned the refuge model we began 41 years ago on its head" Woodward says. To make that principle a reality, Aviva partnered with Auckland based Agency Shine to introduce their safe@home service to Canterbury in September 2012. In the last two years Aviva has been able to support almost three times as many people to become safe while remaining in their own home than they have in their Safe House.

Aviva's new approach has led to the introduction of three other new services. They include ReachOut, which provides early intervention support for men who have used violence, or Formerly Christchurch Women's Refuge

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feel at risk of doing so; No Interest Loans of up to \$2,000 for those affected by family violence and on low incomes; and Specialist Peer Support, which provides training for women and men who have successfully overcome family violence to offer their experience to support and inspire others on their own journey of change. Awareness of the social and financial exclusion that family violence can bring has led Aviva to develop a return-to-work pathway as part of its peer support service.

“These new services really enhance the effectiveness of the education, advocacy and support that we’ve been providing for many years. People are telling us they are not only feeling safer but also much more hopeful about the future and their potential to live more fulfilled, violence-free lives” says Woodward.

“No single agency has or is the solution – we all have a valuable contribution to make. It’s also important to remember that family violence is not just a personal or family issue - it impacts on our wider community. But by supporting all members of the family to achieve enhanced safety and personal wellbeing and, perhaps most importantly, doing so in a spirit of true belief in everyone’s potential to achieve positive change for themselves, we believe we’re making a difference.”

Contact Aviva by calling 0800 AVIVA NOW (0800 28482 669), free phone 24-hours a day or visit www.avivafamilies.org.nz.

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