

Christchurch Women's Refuge

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For Immediate Release

MEDIA RELEASE

New Family Violence Vision Supports Homes to Become Real 'Refuges'

Christchurch Women's Refuge today announced that it is implementing a new approach to breaking the cycle of family violence. Centred upon the agency's belief that the safest place for women and children should be their homes, this new strategy includes services which will reduce the need for women and children to access traditional Safe House accommodation; provide women access to the first specialist family violence peer support programme in the country and establish the first temporary residential accommodation service for men removed from homes where the safety of women and children has been compromised.

The development of these new services reflects an evolution in the agency's philosophy towards a recovery, strength based approach which it believes will better support safety for women and children. "Women and children remain at the heart of what we do and why we do it, it's just the 'how' that is changing" says Christchurch Women's Refuge CEO Nicola Woodward. "We are adding a new dimension to our service that we feel will sustain our communities into the future. It's about rebuilding families free from violence and believing in the potential of every person to move away from violence when given the appropriate support."

The range of new initiatives underlines the agency's belief that families are best supported by removing violence from the home, rather than removing women and children, which has long been the traditional path to safety. Christchurch Women's Refuge is currently seeking funding support that will enable it to make clients' houses physically safer so that women and children can remain at home, amongst their security and support networks. This new service is being adapted from Auckland-based agency Shine's safe@home service, which has proved immensely successful in reducing fear and improving quality of life for women and children living with family violence.

While access to temporary, safe accommodation will still be necessary for some women and children, leaving the family home is inevitably an isolating and disruptive experience, and the 2010/2011 earthquakes have also resulted in significantly reduced accommodation options in Christchurch and North Canterbury. This means that women and children are increasingly unwilling to leave their homes even if they are experiencing violence, and they may struggle to find a new home if they do leave.

To support the removal of violence from the home Christchurch Women's Refuge also intends to develop a temporary residential accommodation service for men who must leave their homes because they have perpetrated family violence, or are considered likely to do so by Police. The residential service, which may offer the opportunity for self-referral, will provide an opportunity for men to take personal responsibility for their behaviour. Early intervention at this stage of crisis can initiate a vital process of self-examination and/or change that may prevent children and adolescents who are experiencing family from perpetuating the same behaviours into adulthood. Men will also be offered access to longer-term services delivered in partnership with other agencies which specialise in men's violence education and support. Currently most access to formal support for men comes only if the judicial

Christchurch Women's Refuge

process requires them to undertake an approved offenders' programme. This situation fails not only men, but the women and children who have been living with violence.

Both of these initiatives will be developed in the next 18 months alongside the establishment of a specialist peer support programme. Pub Charity recently provided seed funding for this initiative, which will be rolled out to women in early 2012 and then further developed for men and young people.

"We know that we are helping to change the lives of many people by supporting them to become and stay safe, but many of the women and children who come to us also want their partners to remain part of their family" says Woodward. "The current family violence model fails them by dividing them, forcing one party into the role of victim and the other into the role of abuser. That's not constructive and it simply isn't working. As a specialist family violence agency with almost 40 years' experience we can see it's time to try a new approach to making and keeping women and children safe. Let's focus on recovery, on the whole family, and let's support men to recover from family violence as well as women and children."

The concept of Christchurch Women's Refuge working with men is not new – until 2006 Christchurch Women's Refuge staff co-facilitated programmes for a men's family violence education service. Christchurch Women's Refuge also intends to work closely with other family-based services to develop these new initiatives in the most effective ways for local families and to ensure that support is available for as long as it is necessary. "Full recovery from family violence can be a long-term journey" says Woodward. "We must be there walking alongside families for longer than we currently do."

Two key partners will be He Waka Tapu and Relationship Services. "He Waka Tapu has had an on-going relationship with Christchurch Women's Refuge for many years" says Managing Director Daryl Gregory. "We are happy to support such a strong and enduring response in this area and we welcome the courage and vision to take this kaupapa forward in our community". Relationship Services Whakawhangaungatanga currently offers men's support programmes and whole of family support. "Christchurch Women's Refuge are very well networked within the communities they support" says Moira Underdown, Upper South Island Area Manager. "We are looking forward to working in partnership with them by providing integrated, longer-term support for the whole family once the need for specialist family violence crisis intervention has been met."

"We have to acknowledge that the needs of our community have changed since Christchurch women first started 'refuge' in New Zealand in 1973" says Christchurch Women's Refuge Chair Madeleine Hawkesby-Browne. "Many women don't want to leave their homes and uproot their family, but they do want to live free from violence, and they are entitled to do so. If we truly want to empower women and families to remain safe and live free from violence we have to change the way we look at the problem of family violence. That applies not only to our agency, but to our whole community. We believe that rebuilding families, free from violence, is the answer."

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

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Christchurch Women's Refuge

Facts About Christchurch Women's Refuge

- Christchurch Women's Refuge is the first Refuge established in New Zealand (1973)
- Most clients do not use the Safe House – they engage in support, advocacy or undertake education and safety programmes while staying in their own, or another, home
- Many women contact Christchurch Women's Refuge directly. However, many others (especially since the earthquakes) engage after being contacted as a person named on Police Reports of Family Violence

Christchurch Women's Refuge Services:

Early Intervention and Prevention Services

Support, advocacy, assistance with accessing essential services and professional referrals.

Ministry of Justice approved women's & children's group, & women's individual, education programmes.

Community liaison, education and partnership

Creating or linking to inter-agency collaborations and networks

Research and service development

Crisis Management Services:

A free 24-hour crisis and support line, and emergency residential services in our Safe House.

Key Statistics

In the year 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011 Christchurch Women's Refuge:

- Supported 1,135 women, children and young people with face-to face service
- Supported 3,500 women, children and young people with phone support when they called our Crisis line
- Offered support to 2,580 women, children and young people named in Police Reports of Family Violence
- Kept 130 women, children and young people safe in our Residential Safe House
- Referrals from Police (POL 400s and Police Safety Orders) increased 7% – an actual increase of 171 more referrals.
- Approximately 15% more staff time required to process and action POL 400s, which also shown a significant increase in the severity of violence.
- Crisis calls rose dramatically – over 48%.