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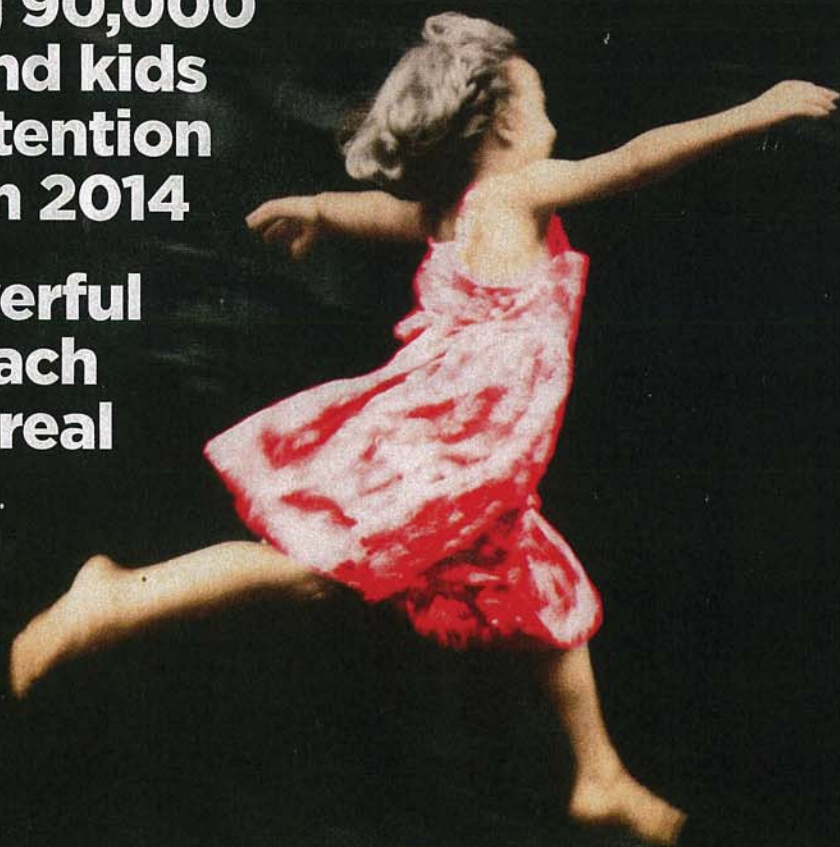
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**HALTING THE HORROR**

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BY KARL DU FRESNE



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# THE RIPPLE EFFECT

The Wairarapa's powerful, proactive approach to family abuse is making a real difference. Is this the model for the nation?  
KARL DU FRESNE reports.



**F**o h, you have all those child murders." It's not what anyone wants to hear about their community, least of all someone fervently committed to ending family violence. But

Gerry Brooking, former police officer and now co-ordinator of Violence Free Network Wairarapa, gets it all the time when she travels around the country.

In fact, as she points out, no child has been murdered in the Wairarapa since Coral Burrows was bludgeoned to death in 2003 – "but people hold on to that perception".

The murder of Coral, a spirited six-year-old from Featherston, wasn't the only hideous crime that gave the Wairarapa a reputation it didn't deserve and certainly didn't want. Before Coral there were half-sisters Saliel Aplin and Olympia Jetson, aged 12 and 11 respectively, stabbed to death in their beds in Masterton in 2001. As with Coral, the killer was their mother's partner.

Only a year before that, Carterton toddler Hinewaoriki Karaitiana-Matiaha, known as Lillybing, died as a result of internal injuries suffered during a brutal assault. One of Lillybing's aunts was jailed for manslaughter and another for wilful ill treatment.

Earlier still, in 1992, unemployed Masterton shearer Raymond Ratima stabbed and battered to death two adults and five children, including his three young sons, in what became known as the Judds Rd massacre. The summary of facts read in court said marital stress, money problems, homelessness and a family grudge were factors that led to the killing spree.

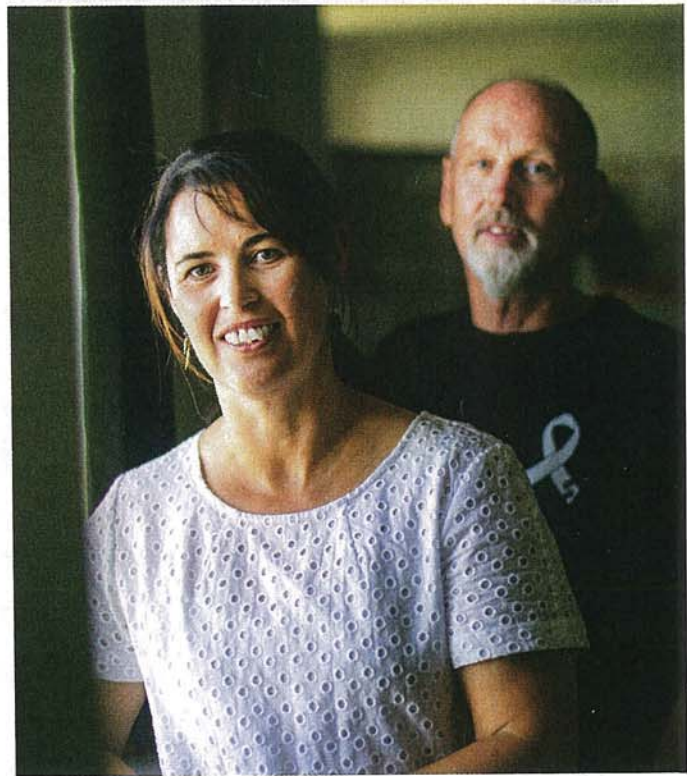
The series of child killings left the Wairarapa reeling. "It was a horrendous patch," recalls Bob Francis, the former long-serving mayor of Masterton. "It put enormous pressure on the region."

But the tragedies had one positive consequence: they shocked and shamed the

community into action.

Today, the Wairarapa is cited as a model of how communities can unite to fight violence in the home. In a report published last year, family violence expert Ruth Herbert singled out the region for its "progressive" approach to the problem and urged that the Wairarapa serve as a test bed for a nationwide change of approach in the way domestic violence and child abuse are dealt with.

A former chief executive of the Glenn Inquiry into child abuse and domestic violence, Herbert is scathing in her assessment of services for dealing with family violence nationally, describing them as fragmented and inconsistent. Her report, co-authored by Deborah Mackenzie, urged a radical overhaul in which a "top-down" approach would be replaced by a "bottom-up" model that would give greater autonomy to local



**Gerry Brooking, left, and Jeremy Logan: pioneering a collaborative approach.**

communities. The Wairarapa, says Herbert, is already well down that path and could give a lead to other regions.

It's an issue Justice Minister Amy Adams has pledged to make a priority. In a recent speech to Parliament, Adams said half of New Zealand's violent offending takes place in the home. "Fifty per cent of homicides are family violence-related," she said.

GETTY IMAGES; MIKE HENDON

On average, 14 women, eight children and seven men die every year in domestic violence incidents.

**ENOUGH IS ENOUGH**

In hindsight, what has happened in the Wairarapa doesn't seem radical. In essence, a series of vile crimes stung the community into adopting a collaborative approach to a problem that had previously been tackled by a plethora of agencies and community groups acting independently and often not talking to each other. According to Herbert, that's still the pattern in many places.

The murders of Saliel and Olympia by Bruce Howse, now serving a 28-year prison term with no chance of parole, were the tipping point. An official report found there had been no shortage of warning signs that the half-sisters were at risk. They had been monitored by Child, Youth and Family Services (CYFS; now Child, Youth and Family, or CYF) nearly all their lives, had been allegedly abused on at least five occasions and were repeatedly exposed to violence. The girls had lived in 10 homes, attended six schools and lived with their grandparents for two years after being removed from their mother's care.

Police were called to their home 18 times and completed 12 family violence reports, but none were forwarded to CYFS.

The Children's Commissioner found that support for the girls was "fragmented" – a word that crops up repeatedly in studies of the way family violence is dealt with in New Zealand.

The Commissioner's report noted that opportunities for intervention were lost because no single agency had the whole picture or a complete understanding of the risks Saliel and Olympia faced. Each of the various agencies involved with the family

had a partial understanding of the issues, but they never met to discuss their concerns and dealt only with the matters that directly involved them.

Judging by Herbert's report, that's still the way things are done in many parts of New Zealand. But in the Wairarapa, the community took matters into its own hands.

Francis, who stood down in 2007 after 21

years as mayor, recalls the deaths of Saliel and Olympia as the catalyst. "That was when we said, 'Enough is enough – we have to address this as a community'. We couldn't leave it to the police and CYFS."

A former international test rugby referee, Francis played a key role in channelling community disgust over the deaths into a Violence Free Wairarapa campaign. According to Jeremy Logan, who manages Masterton-based Stopping Violence Services Wairarapa (SVSW), that was the starting point for a crucial change in attitudes towards family violence. From being regarded as the responsibility of government departments, it came to be seen as a wider community issue.

Today Violence Free Network Wairarapa encompasses more than 40 organisations as diverse as SVSW, Plunket, Women's Refuge, iwi organisations, Neighbourhood Support and mental health support groups – even SuperGrans, which advises young families on how to grow their own vegetables and manage

on a budget, and the SPCA. Government departments and non-government organisations that previously didn't talk to each other now meet regularly to exchange information about at-risk families.

Logan, a softly spoken man who worked in horticulture before becoming a counsellor 15 years ago, talks of the old "silos mentality" being replaced by a culture of information-sharing and trust. Police reports on family violence incidents, previously filed away, are

tabled at weekly meetings and followed up.

It all seems glaringly logical now, but it took a string of tragedies to make it happen. And according to Herbert, other regions can learn from the Wairarapa example. (See "Enter at any point", page 23.)

**BEYOND THE BRIEF**

Among other things, the Wairarapa experience shows the importance of a few committed individuals. Francis's support was crucial in getting official recognition and traction, says Brooking. "You can do this stuff at a community level but it's difficult if you don't also have council leadership. And Bob had the power to bring public attention to the issue." Logan adds that as mayor, Francis was always accessible and ready to help.

Another key figure was police sergeant Glenn Taplin, co-ordinator of the Masterton police family violence unit. He and Logan were instrumental in setting up a family violence intervention group (FVIG), which brought together representatives of government departments, non-government organisations and community groups.

Brooking says that within police culture, family violence was often treated as a low priority. The dynamics of family violence are unclear and there's not a lot of glory in it for detectives, she says. "You don't appear on the TV news saying, 'We locked up a murderer.'"

CIB detectives would leave domestic violence to the uniformed (general duties) branch and often the two branches didn't talk to each other. Sometimes they would be dealing with the same families over different issues without realising it – a state of affairs Brooking describes as bizarre.

She says Taplin changed the way the Masterton police treated domestic abuse – and was regarded by some of his colleagues as a pain in the neck for doing it. "Glenn was always challenging police not just to turn up to a domestic [incident], separate the partners and walk away, which was general practice for many years. He would say, 'Take the time, find out what's going on, fill out a report so that we can follow up the longer-term issues.'"

Under Taplin, prosecutions for family violence climbed sharply. "Glenn has a real commitment to the community and challenged police practice locally," says Brooking. "He went way beyond the scope of his brief."

Taplin has since moved to Northland where, according to Brooking, he has had a



From top: Coral Burrows; Hinewaoriki (Lillybing) Karaitiana-Matiaha; Saliel Aplin, left, and Olympia Jetson.

similar impact. Northland's family violence statistics have gone through the roof since he took over, she says. Why? "Because police up there are taking it more seriously."

### CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

The nerve centre of Violence Free Network Wairarapa is the third floor of a bland 1970s-style government building in the centre of Masterton. It's the headquarters not only of the network but of SVSW, which runs family violence prevention programmes. There's a cheerful buzz about the

CYF and Women's Refuge, meets twice weekly to deal with specific family situations that need an urgent response. FVIG, a broader, community-based group consisting of 12 government agencies and local community organisations, meets every week and looks at the bigger, longer-term picture.

Consciousness-raising events such as street marches and sports contests form one strand of the network's anti-violence strategy. The network was an early adopter of the white ribbon campaign, which targets violence against women, and it continues to

government funding but it's worth continuing because it connects with a sector of the community that the anti-violence message might not otherwise reach, such as sports clubs and licensed clubs. She also credits the It's Not Okay campaign, launched by the Ministry of Social Development in 2007, with a sharp increase in the reporting of domestic violence.

According to Logan, experience shows such campaigns are an effective prevention tool. "It's a bit like the safety-belt campaign or drink-driving." He says one consequence



Clockwise from top left: former Masterton mayor Bob Francis; police sergeant Glenn Taplin; the Wairarapa's Masterton, Martinborough and Castlepoint.

place that belies the seriousness of the work.

The network includes representatives from several government departments – including police, CYF, Work and Income, Corrections and the District Court – along with NGOs and several community groups. How the various organisations interrelate isn't always clear to an outsider, and the cumbersome names – often reduced to acronyms such as FVIG and FVIARS (family violence interagency response system) – can be bewildering. But it seems to work.

FVIARS, a core group involving police,

support the Blow the Whistle on Violence campaign that was launched nationwide to coincide with the 2011 Rugby World Cup.

Brooking says domestic violence often increases when rugby and alcohol come together, but when the Blow the Whistle campaign ran during the seven weeks of the Cup, reported family violence incidents fell to a record low. She adds with a wry grin: "It probably helped that we won [the Cup]."

The Wairarapa is one of the few regions where the Blow the Whistle campaign is still running. Brooking says it does not receive

of awareness-raising campaigns is that violent men are more likely to come forward for help voluntarily, rather than be referred by police or other government agencies.

Self-referrals once comprised only a small proportion of SVSW's clients but now account for roughly half. It's a welcome change, but it comes with a catch: the state pays for men to undertake SVSW's programmes only if they have been referred by government agencies, so funding for other participants has to be found elsewhere if they can't afford to pay.

GETTY IMAGES; MIKE HERTON

# They're not alone

A holistic approach to family abuse is helping to change the culture of at-risk groups.

Some come willingly, some grudgingly. But once violent men are given an opportunity to change, says Jeremy Logan, most take it. Logan manages Stopping Violence Services Wairarapa (SVSW), which runs programmes for men with a record of domestic abuse. He says that in the first few weeks of the programme they may be resistant, afraid and uncertain – “but usually by the time it finishes, a lot of the participants don't want it to end. They've found a safe place to be honest and to really front up to what's going on in their lives.”

Whereas many participants are referred to SVSW by the courts, some do the programme by choice. Either way, says SVSW clinical leader Kay Wilton, they're treated respectfully. “We've changed the way we think about domestic violence,” she says. “Historically when men came in, they were made to feel they weren't okay – there was shame. Now we try to work with them.”

The aim of the programme is to help violent men understand why they behave the way they do and invite them to “buy in” to something different, which Wilton says many do. The group programme runs for two and a half hours a week over 16 weeks. It's conducted by a male and female facilitator. “The woman facilitator is there to bring a female perspective, which is really important,” says Logan.

“Ideally we get men not only questioning their own ideas and behaviours but questioning and supporting each other to make positive changes.” He says it helps when they realise they're not alone.

Wilton says once it's offered to them, most men want some change. “They know their partners and kids are living in



Changing the focus: from left, Kay Wilton, Jeremy Logan and Gerry Brooking.

fear and they want something different.” A video showing the impact of violence on children's lives can bring men to tears.

Logan adds that many participants grew up in violent circumstances and want their children to experience something better. There is nearly always a background of trauma. Occasionally, therapeutic work is required – “for example, if there is sexual abuse ... or other major issues getting in the way of their engaging in the programme. We'll provide additional counselling over and above what we're required to do, because if other areas of a man's life are falling

apart, he's not going to be able to focus on his behaviour.”

Techniques for dealing with domestic violence have changed over the years, says Logan. The term “anger management” is no longer used. “That's the old language. They can often manage their anger with the boss at work, but not at home with their families. A lot of participants are employed in tough workplaces where they feel disempowered and home is one place where they're in control.”

People with more power will pass their

MIKE HEYDON

pain on to people with less power, he says. "Bosses can pass it on to workers, teachers can pass it on to students, men can pass it on to women, adults can pass it on to children. Often they do it without realising it."

The difference, says Wilton, is that angry men are far more likely to cause death and hospitalisation. She says a lot of self-justification, minimising and blame goes on. "There's a lot of collusion that invites men to say, 'Oh, I'm not that bad, there are guys far worse than me.'"

Logan adds that men sometimes justify themselves by saying "she's just as violent as me". In fact, he says, recent research does suggest that relationship violence is about equal – "but that's often because the female partner might

## **People with more power will pass their pain on to people with less power. "Often they do it without realising it."**

strike out when she's being intimidated". It can be a reaction of fear or retaliation. In any case, he points out, it's still unequal because men tend not to be scared of their partners. The fear of harm is much higher for women.

Another change is that programmes are now offered for women and young people as well as men. "One of the reasons we've done that is that it's important to empower women to realise they don't have to stay in abusive relationships," says Logan. "A guy will go from one relationship to another and just keep doing it, so it needs women to stand up – to become empowered to say it's not okay. Because if a woman has grown up in an abusive environment, it's easy for her to think this is normal."

He adds that not all the women SVSW deals with are victims. A minority are perpetrators, which is in line with national statistics.

Wilton says the programme seeks to empower men too, albeit in a different way. Men are encouraged to learn about themselves and make different choices. Many don't realise they can take control of their behaviour.

Wilton and Logan use the word "holistic" to describe SVSW's approach. "Historically we'd get the man in, get him on a programme and expect him to change," says Wilton. "We've learnt we need to be more holistic – we need to be looking at the family rather than someone individually. So the family makes a commitment to be free of violence."

"More and more, if a guy enrolls here, we'll contact his partner and let her know what's available for her too," says Logan. "Also, we'll seek feedback on any changes she sees in him and whether the programme is making a positive difference."

"Sometimes they'll progress to relationship counselling together, once she can feel safe about talking frankly without fear of intimidation. We're not here to separate couples. We want them to build strong, healthy relationships."

Wilton adds that even if their relationship is beset by violence, many couples are committed to each other.

Logan notes that the holistic approach extends beyond couples and families. "Sometimes we might make a man see that his attitudes and behaviour are unacceptable, but if he's going back into a community where it's the norm, it's very hard to maintain that. That's why the public awareness-raising campaigns have been so important – we have to change the culture of communities where abuse is seen as normal."

"The more we can change the community view of violence as being okay, the more success we'll have at an individual level. That's why we see it as a community-wide issue."

SVSW's programmes are provided to self-referring participants on a koha (donation) basis, but many can't afford to pay. Funding comes from a variety of sources: the Ministry of Social Development, the Lotteries Commission, the Community Organisation Grants Scheme (COGS), district councils and the Masterton Licensing Trust. "We go wherever we can [for money]," says Logan.

Wilton notes the irony that SVSW gets mandated government funding when people come through the court system, but not when they self-refer. "In a way, our success [as measured by people self-referring] is undermining our financial viability."

## **GETTING IN EARLY**

At the sharp end, though, Violence Free Network Wairarapa is mostly about intervention. It was decided in 2010 that simply sharing information, as crucial as it is, was not enough.

"Police get really frustrated when they're going to the same house again and again and nothing changes," says Brooking. "We were seeing that pattern week after week and we'd sit in meetings and say, 'Oh yeah – them again.' But we wouldn't do anything, so how could we expect anything to change? We decided it wasn't good enough just to know about families – we had to be more proactive about engaging them, getting in early before things get to a critical level or someone gets harmed."

The result, she says, was a drop of 20-25% in reported incidents each week. "We went

## **"The mentality was that unless the woman leaves the relationship, nothing's going to change. That has turned on its head."**

from 25 [offences] a week to 15-20 a week because what we were doing was engaging with families."

Not all the initiatives against family violence in the Wairarapa originated locally. FVIARS, for instance, was introduced nationally in 2006. But Brooking and Logan stress the importance of community ownership and involvement. Brooking describes the family violence intervention group, for example, as being community-owned. Police and other government agencies are involved, but Brooking manages the meetings and ensures that cases brought to the group's notice are followed up.

An incident as minor as a broken window might come to the group's attention, pointing to a family with problems that need to be tackled before they escalate. "That would be looked at in the context of the wider dynamics of what's happening [in the family], perhaps indicating that there's wider stuff to be addressed," explains Brooking.

A Family Safety Team – one of several nationwide – operates from the Masterton police station, and while it has the usual police powers, it can use other approaches

besides arrest and prosecution. "You can keep prosecuting," says Brooking, "but intervention is more proactive."

Sometimes it helps if the police stay out of things altogether. "Mothers might not disclose domestic violence to an authority figure such as a cop because they worry about having the kids taken away, but they may be more forthcoming with a less threatening helper."

Brooking says that when SVSW's family/whanau advocate turns up on a family's doorstep, her usual line is: "I'm not the police and I'm not from CYF - I'm here for you."

It's clear that the family advocate, who is often the first point of contact for troubled families, plays a crucial role. But when asked to explain exactly what she does, Brooking pauses. "She's not a social worker, she's not a counsellor ... she's kind of a navigator really, just engaging with families in whatever way she might think fit - getting engagement, explaining what needs to be done, allaying people's fears and talking them through the process."

Logan adds that the family advocate often helps simply by establishing relationships with abused women who have reached the end of their tether. "Sometimes women are just worn out, feeling isolated and possibly blaming themselves. To have someone come in and take an interest and say 'I'm here to support you and the children' can be a huge relief."

The advocate's non-threatening approach is also reassuring to women who worry they'll lose their children unless they kick their violent partners out. That was the way things used to be done, says Brooking, but the thinking has shifted. "A lot of the 1990s mentality was that unless the woman leaves the relationship, nothing's going to change. In terms of the way we work, that has turned on its head. We accept that the couple are probably going to get back together, so the issue is how can that be done in a safe way?"

Brooking says that although most of the cases that come before the family violence intervention group are referred to it by police, that more people are coming forward of their own accord "shows people are wanting to address their issues without getting the police involved. Things aren't being left to the critical stage as much as they used to be."

The network's pervasive links into the community are invaluable. The District Health Board might notify the group of an

attempted suicide or someone with mental health issues - telltale signs of family tension. A hospital emergency department might advise them of a patient with an injury supposedly caused by an accident, but that looks suspiciously like the result of an assault.

Other sources of information include GPs, nurses, teachers and school counsellors. On the day Brooking spoke to the *Listener*, she received a phone call from an early childhood centre expressing concern about some of the children in its care.

A close relationship with the police also helps. "Our family advocate goes to other parts of the country and people are amazed that she can just pick up the phone and get a police officer around straight away to speak to the person she's dealing with," says Brooking. "A lot of areas don't have that sort of relationship."

**"To have someone come in and take an interest and say 'I'm here to support you and the children' can be a huge relief."**

## THE CO-GENDER APPROACH

Logan says there's been a significant shift in the attitude of police and courts - a move away from automatic prosecution in favour of trying to find the right help for families. Masterton has one of New Zealand's eight specialist family violence courts, which sits every second week. Judges in the family violence court also sit in the family and youth courts, so may see the same family in all three courts, enabling them to get an all-round picture.

Brooking and Logan are clearly admirers of the family violence court system. Logan says people still get charged and prosecuted, but the slant is different: the safety of the victim and of children is paramount. A court appearance provides a chance for the offender to undertake a prevention programme that can help the whole family escape the pattern of violence.

But prosecution remains a useful tool when men are unprepared to change their behaviour, says Brooking. "If there's no arrest, there's no incentive for a man to change his behaviour if he doesn't want to."

Logan adds that SVSW works more "holistically" than before. As well as dealing with men referred to it by the courts, it tries to work with partners and families. From an early emphasis on anger management, the focus has shifted to programmes that reflect what Logan describes as a more sophisticated understanding of family violence. It's co-gender rather than men-to-men and there's a broader examination of the power dynamics in relationships. (See "They're not alone", page 20.)

"Another shift," says Brooking, "is that we're now seeing more women's empowerment. You could lock a woman in a room and that would keep her safe, but you can do that forever. At some point there has to be some empowerment for her to be able to make choices and changes."

Logan notes that up to 40% of SVSW clients are women. "First we saw that we needed to hold men accountable. Then we needed to change [their] attitudes. But the next big area was to empower the so-called victim and her family and also work with the young people."

The next step, says Brooking, is to raise the consciousness of "bystanders" - those outside the immediate family. "If people stay silent, if they're not challenging violent behaviour, then really they're condoning it."

## A DIFFERENT CLIENTELE

There's other new territory to be conquered. So far, much of the focus has been on known "problem" areas, typically in lower socioeconomic zones. But Brooking and Logan know that abuse also happens in affluent middle-class homes, where it's much harder to confront.

Middle-class people are "really tough" to work on, says Logan, because they have much more to lose - status and reputation, for example.

Brooking adds: "There's a sense of entitlement too, with the men particularly. They often have connections in the community. The women have connections, they don't want to be shamed. Often with white middle-class women, financial control and coercion are an issue as well. It's not just physical violence. But these cases are less likely to come to our attention because they're self-referring."

There are signs of progress, though. Kay Wilton, clinical leader at SVSW, noted in the past two years that she was working with a different clientele - "a di-





Family violence expert Ruth Herbert: "Agencies operate as silos and invariably don't know what other agencies can offer and hence are unable to make appropriate referrals."

to the required destination. In contrast, she says of New Zealand's system for dealing with victims and perpetrators of family violence: "There are very few lines connecting the stations, there are no maps or signage to guide people around the system, many stations are overcrowded with people, some people are lost between stations trying to navigate for themselves, some stations are missing altogether and only a few of the staff running the system

**"There are over 200 largely disconnected groups, networks and co-ordinators trying to address the problem nationally and regionally."**

have been fully trained."

Herbert says it's difficult for victims, abusers and families to find their way around a maze of disconnected services and systems, each with different policies and processes. Her proposed solution is a new integrated system consisting of a national "backbone" agency and about 32 regional hubs. Local input is central to the concept. "To date most family violence initiatives have been top-down, designed by central government agencies with little or no input from the community, local service providers or victims/survivors. Moving to an integrated system means we'd need to start thinking locally, acting locally and resourcing locally to build this new system."

Under her proposal, Wairarapa would be the first regional hub. She says it's the ideal place to test the concept because of a solid collaborative foundation built up over the past 15 years, with an existing network ready and willing to embrace the new approach.

Herbert told the *Listener* her report was an attempt to "move the conversation from where we've been stuck for years, which is just talking about the problem, to saying, 'Let's think about something bigger than what we're already doing, because what we're doing isn't working.'"

## Enter at any point

With the current support set-up considered a complex maze, the London Underground provides a surprising example of a better way.

**D**omestic violence has been the subject of countless official reports, working parties and inquiries, often duplicating each other and running simultaneously under the auspices of different agencies. But as Ruth Herbert observed glumly in her 2014 report *The Way Forward*, "New Zealand has not made significant traction in responding to or reducing the problem."

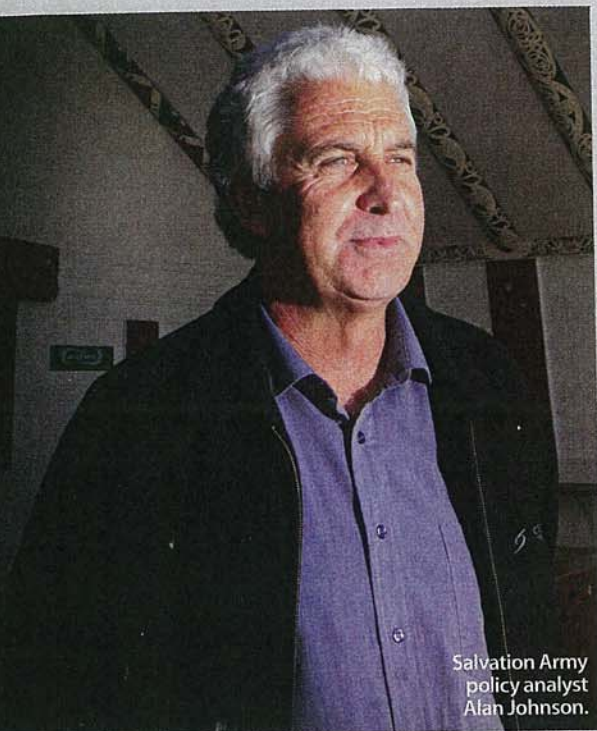
Herbert was the original executive director of the Sir Owen Glenn Inquiry into child abuse and domestic violence, but quit in 2013 following what was described

as a breakdown in the relationship with Glenn. Her report describes the current arrangements for dealing with domestic violence nationally as complicated, fragmented and confusing. "There are over 200 largely disconnected leadership, governance and multi-agency groups, networks and co-ordinators trying to address the problem nationally and regionally."

The system is dauntingly hard to navigate. In an unexpected analogy, Herbert cites the London Underground as a model of a complex but integrated system where travellers can enter at any point and proceed, often via multiple connected routes,

# 'A hell of a lot'

One in 10 children in New Zealand are at risk of abuse or neglect.



Salvation Army policy analyst Alan Johnson.

**T**here's bad news and not-so-bad news in the latest statistics on child abuse and neglect in New Zealand. Figures in the Salvation Army's 2015 State of the Nation report show that total notifications to Child Youth and Family (CYF) – information given to CYF by police or other sources (such as neighbours, teachers or nurses) advising of children potentially at risk – were down by 1.3% in 2014, although still 17% higher than in 2010.

But that tiny decline looks less encouraging in the context of the actual numbers. Notifications in 2014 still totalled 146,657, a staggering average of 400 a day, involving more than 90,000 children. (In many cases, the same children were the subject of more than one notification.)

Neglect or abuse was substantiated in 13.4% of those cases – 15% down on 2013, although Salvation Army policy analyst Alan Johnson suggests that reported decline should be viewed with some scepticism. He finds it hard to believe that so many abusive parents suddenly stopped mistreating their children. "In social data, things don't normally change that abruptly."

One possible explanation for the sharp drop reported, he says, is that government agencies may have adopted a higher threshold for "substantiation" of abuse. He says a lower rate of child abuse and

neglect is one of the Government's "better public services" targets – "and what tends to happen, particularly if you incentivise your managers to work towards those targets, is that the targets can be manipulated by the way you approach them".

The figures show that physical abuse represented 17.4% of substantiated child abuse cases last year, a small increase. Emotional abuse continued to be the most common form of harm, making up more than 50% of all cases.

Johnson attributes an almost tripling of notifications since 2005 to a change in police practice. Police now notify CYF in all cases of family violence where children are present. He says police generally take a more active approach to child abuse than they used to, although the situation varies from region to region. Differences in reported rates of domestic violence and child abuse between regions may come down to differing attitudes on the part of area police commanders.

One statistic weighs heavily on Johnson. He points out that the 90,000 children who were the subject of notifications last year represent 9% of the country's total child population. "So what we're saying is that 9% of our children in any one year come to the attention of the child protection authorities for potential abuse or neglect.

"One in 10 of our kids at risk of neglect or abuse – it seems a hell of a lot."

socio-economic group. There's a little bit more openness, in my experience, about the white middle class looking at their behaviour. I've been doing this work since 1996 and you just couldn't get through [to that group] years ago."

What's changed? Wilton puts it down to those awareness-raising campaigns. "They have given men permission to say, 'Maybe I need to do something; I don't like my partner and children being afraid of me.'"

Women, too, feel more empowered to say "This is not okay," says Wilton. Many men come in because their partners have said, "I'm not going to put up with this any more – either we're going to separate or you're going to have to see someone about your abusive behaviour."

With the white middle class, it's often an issue of psychological power and control rather than violence, adds Wilton. "Getting them to see that what they're doing is harmful is really difficult. They're my hardest clients."

Domestic violence in rural areas is another issue again. Logan says it's even more difficult for people in these communities to come forward. "Isolation is often part of the problem. Violence has always thrived in isolation. There is less likelihood of neighbours who will call the police. We probably still have a lot of work to do in rural communities."

## THE EVIDENCE

Just how effective is the Wairarapa approach to family violence? An obvious answer, if a brutally negative one, is that no child has been murdered in the Wairarapa since 2003. But an application for Lottery Commission funding to formally evaluate the network's effectiveness was turned down, and Brooking admits most of the evidence is anecdotal.

One positive statistic is that the number of family violence incidents reported to the intervention group fell about 20% after the group adopted a more proactive approach in 2010. Brooking also cites an increase in the number of people voluntarily reporting concerns – including family members and neighbours – and a reduction in the "seriousness" of incidents reported, which she believes is the result of people seeking help before things reach a crisis point.

Repeat incidents have dropped too; the same families no longer come to

NEWSPIX



the group's attention week after week, and self-referrals to SVSW increased to 50% in 2012-13, indicating a greater willingness to address violence in the home.

Brooking stops short of saying the Wairarapa is winning against family violence. Terrible injuries inflicted on children elsewhere – the baby Kahui twins in South Auckland, Nia Glassie in Rotorua – may have shifted the spotlight, but she touches wood if anyone suggests the Wairarapa's pain is all in the past.

For one thing, there's the frightening national statistic that only an estimated 20% of incidents are reported. "Even if no one's dying, there's still that massive 80% that no one knows about who are suffering harm. But there has certainly been a huge turnaround in the past 10 years in terms of how agencies and family violence professionals respond and work together in the Wairarapa."

Whether the Wairarapa model can be transferred to a larger metropolitan area such as South Auckland is another matter, since everyone associated with it agrees the success of Violence Free Network Wairarapa is closely linked to the nature of the community it serves. Masterton has a population of about 23,000 – small enough for people to feel connected and share a sense that they have a personal stake in the community.

As Brooking points out, people are closer

in a small town. "Your kids might be at the same school as the families you're working with, or you might bump into them in the supermarket. If you're a police officer, you might be talking to the guy you locked up last night. You have a special onus of responsibility in a small town because that's where you live. There's a real responsibility to do things well. It's in your own best interests because you're part of the community."

### **The same families no longer come to the group's attention week after week, and self-referrals increased to 50% in 2012-13.**

Wilton agrees that informal small-town knowledge often helps workers make connections with families who need support. "It's like a ripple effect spreading outward. The ripple effect is quite powerful."

It probably helps that the people behind Violence Free Network Wairarapa are practical, down-to-earth individuals, grounded and engaged in their community. They work part-time – most have other jobs – and much of what they do attracts little

**Committed: Justice Minister Amy Adams.**

government funding.

Asked whether the lessons learned in the Wairarapa could be applied elsewhere, Logan is cautious. Every community is different, he says. "When the government tries to put out something across the country, it runs into trouble, because it doesn't take account of the uniqueness of each community. We're looking at maybe 20, 30 reported family violence incidents a week here. In larger cities they might be dealing with hundreds."

But there's no doubt in Ruth Herbert's mind that Violence Free Network Wairarapa could be a model for other regions, though she's less sure why it works so well. "Everyone, including Jeremy and Gerry, would like to know what the formula was that got them so far ahead. It's undoubtedly a whole number of things, including the quality of those two people. They're great workers. They don't muck around, they just get on with it."

"We do need to bear in mind that any change like this is easier in a small geographically defined community like the Wairarapa. To try to do it in South Auckland, even with the support of the police and the mayor, is going to be harder. But we have to find a way to transfer that model to a bigger place." ■