



**te aroha noa**

COMMUNITY SERVICES

**COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE**  
**THE VIOLENCE FREE  
COMMUNITY PROJECT**

---

**Jackie Sanders | Kathryn Handley | Robyn Munford | Bruce Maden**

---



**MASSEY  
UNIVERSITY**  
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND



Let us join hands to form a circle where respect and responsibility reign.

Let this union represent our vision of a family and a community free of violent practices.

Let this joining mark our commitment to work with love and sensibility at all costs.

Let this union be a symbol of non-violence and peace.

Let us remember the roads we have been obliged to take, roads often dark and full of pain, treacherous and unjust.

Let us remember that our families like the plants must be cared for day by day.

Let us reconnect with the 'prospect' messages of our culture and take action to affirm everyone's right to a life of dignity.

Let us spread the message of love and respect for a better future in the name of all the families that participated in this Violence Free Community Project.

A background graphic consisting of stylized human figures in grey, holding hands in a circular pattern. The figures are arranged in a way that suggests a community or a group of people standing together. The figures are simple, with no facial features, and are connected by their arms, forming a continuous loop.

**COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE**

# THE VIOLENCE FREE COMMUNITY PROJECT

**Jackie Sanders | Kathryn Handley | Robyn Munford | Bruce Maden**

TE AROHA NOA | PALMERSTON NORTH | MAY 2012





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**This publication was made possible  
by the contributions of:**

Te Aroha Noa Community Services

Bruce Maden | Kathryn Handley

Social Work and Social Policy Programme  
Massey University

Jackie Sanders | Robyn Munford

All the staff, families and whanau who  
participated in the Violence Free Community  
Project

Lottery Community Sector Research Committee.  
The Community Responses to Violence research  
project was funded by a grant from the Lottery  
Community Sector Research Fund.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement .....	4
Executive Summary.....	5
Introduction .....	6
Te Aroha Noa Community Services .....	6
Literature – setting a context for the project .....	9
Research Methodology .....	16
Secondary Data.....	17
Primary Data .....	17
Ethical Issues .....	18
The VFCP .....	18
The story of the initiative .....	19
Violence Exposed: ‘Violence has 1000 names’ (August 2009). .....	27
The Web of Violence.....	32
Conversation Part 1: ‘Web Busting’ (29 July 2010).....	32
Conversation Part 2: ‘Breaking Free’ (5 August 2010) .....	36
The final conversation .....	39
Operation Violence 9th September 2010 .....	40
Reflections on all the hui.....	40
Reflections re conversations after Violence has 1000 names .....	40
Understanding the dynamics of change .....	42
Tracing the Ripples from the VFCP .....	43
Proximal effects .....	43
Distal effects .....	47
Individual Change .....	47
Individual change story 1 .....	48
Individual change story 2.....	48
Individual change story 3.....	49
Individual change story 4.....	51
Organisational Change .....	52
Themes related to violence spread into other initiatives.....	53
Community conversations take on other forms .....	54
Have a safe space to think dangerously.....	55
Ripples from earlier work .....	58
Conclusions .....	59
CEO Reflections .....	64
References .....	65







White ribbon day with the Supa Māori Fellas.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

With grateful thanks to the Lotteries Commission which provided funding to allow Te Aroha Noa to document the development of the Violence Free Community Project and in this process to come to a more detailed understanding of the factors which influence successful community-based initiatives. We would also like to acknowledge the *community consultants* whose expertise, wisdom and experience made the VFCP a success. We would also like to acknowledge the members of the Highbury neighbourhood who participated so positively in the *community conversations* and in the process became leaders of change in Highbury. Finally, thanks go to the staff who tirelessly supported the initiative and contributed of themselves at every step of the process taking learning from the VFCP into their practice.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report details the development and operation of a community-based violence prevention programme (VFCP) developed and run at Te Aroha Noa Community Services (Te Aroha Noa) in the Palmerston North suburb of Highbury from 2007 to 2010. The research project documented in this report was funded by the Lotteries Commission Community Research Fund<sup>1</sup>. The VFCP was funded out of the Community Action Fund for the first twelve months of operation. This fund was part of the Campaign for Action on Family Violence a community driven, cross sectoral initiative led by the Ministry of Social Development and the NZ Families Commission. The focus was upon creating community-level conversations that would build on existing initiatives and enlarge understandings of violence and from there to develop locally-tuned initiatives that targeted violence reduction. The VFCP was an exploratory project; it located itself between the two more traditional approaches to family violence reduction – social marketing campaigns seeking to shift attitudes primarily through the medium of public advertising and intervention and therapeutic work with individuals affected by family violence.

The context of the project is described both in terms of the theoretical approach to service delivery adopted at Te Aroha Noa and also in terms of the wider literature relating to community initiatives that target family violence. Appreciative inquiry methodologies were adopted in the research because these had a good fit with the overall approach of the VFCP in that they allowed diverse voices to be heard and had a good fit with the emergent design of the VFCP itself. The bulk of the report addresses the development of the initiative from 2007 through to 2010. Proximal and distal effects from the initiative are explored and the report also identifies distal effects from earlier initiatives developed at Te Aroha Noa to illustrate the way in which community development initiatives can generate ripple effects that continue to have impact long after the initiative itself has finished.

## Key lessons from the VFCP are identified:

1. The *community conversation* process is an effective method to raise awareness of violence and to create change.
2. The *community conversation* approach needs to be developed within strong community organisations that are recognised in their communities as trustworthy and long-term members of the local community.

3. The *community consultants* need to be drawn in at the start of the project and there needs to be a commitment to continue to work as a team to the very end.
4. The funder and host organisation need to make a commitment to support the initiative until it comes to a natural end otherwise there is a risk of generating ill feeling and a sense of being let down.
5. Frequent meetings especially in the early days are important to allow for small, regular, incremental steps to be taken that keep people connected to the initiative.
6. Narrative and psychodrama have some valuable strategies and techniques to offer for an initiative like this that draw people into activity-based rather than passive learning. It was necessary to have strong processes in place that retained the external focus and to build the discipline among all participants of reminding each other of the need to focus outwardly.
7. As the project nears its end, time needs to be spent defining processes for keeping violence on the agenda and encouraging this to be through a diverse range of methods and forums
8. Strategies for building confidence and capacity included:
  - a. Drawing people in at the earliest stage.
  - b. Strong pre-existing relationships mean that people can trust the process.
  - c. Project members need to watch for spill over from the initiative into daily life and from daily life into the initiative and actively manage these.
  - d. Look for connections inside the project between people, between the different programmes in the organisation, and out in the community; this is where the major benefits of the project will be found and the overall effectiveness of the initiative will be proportional to the number of these synergies that people can seize upon.
  - e. Allow the space and time to deal with things as they come up.
  - f. The initiative needs a strong team who can work together and who do not have any major issues between them so that they are confident in their ability to deal with matters as they arise and know that they can count on each other for support.
9. An iterative process was developed for moving from thinking and talking, to action.

<sup>1</sup> Te Aroha Noa gratefully thanks and acknowledges the Lotteries Commission for providing funding to support the research project that documented the development of the VFCP.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2007 Te Aroha Noa Community Services (Te Aroha Noa) received funding from the Community Action Fund. This fund was part of the Campaign for Action on Family Violence; a community driven, cross sectoral initiative led by the Ministry of Social Development and the NZ Families Commission. The funding allowed Te Aroha Noa to develop an innovative community-based initiative that would help address family violence. After the VFCP funding had ended, Te Aroha Noa received funding from the Lotteries Commission to undertake a research project which documented the effects of the initiative.

The Violence Free Community Project (VFCP) envisioned by Te Aroha Noa sought to activate local community networks in a process of violence reduction. It located itself between the social marketing approaches and the client-based individual and family work that have traditionally characterised family violence initiatives. The focus was upon harnessing the energy and expertise of local people (called *community consultants* in this initiative) to create *community conversations* that enlarged understandings of violence so that people could work locally to reduce violence in the neighbourhood. This would be achieved by bringing the issue of family/whānau violence to the attention of the community and from there identifying community-led mechanisms for supporting individuals and families to make positive change for their family/whānau.

The community consultant collaborative model was a key component of this initiative. This model grew out of work Te Aroha Noa had been doing for a number of years (see for example, Handley et al., 2009) that was concerned with finding ways of drawing the people from the neighbourhood into the operation of the Centre<sup>2</sup>. Some of this effort had focused upon creating pathways for local people to achieve qualifications that would enable them to gain employment within the Centre or to serve on the Trust Board in a governance capacity, but another strand of work focused upon creating opportunities for a larger number and wider range of individuals and family groups to come into the Centre and for the Centre to take part in community events. It was this latter strand of activity that laid the foundation for the community consultant model. This was to be a community-organisation partnership that would provide a forum for Te Aroha Noa staff and people from the neighbourhood to come together on an equal basis sharing their experiences and expertise to collaboratively develop the project.

This research project, funded by the Lotteries Commission, had the task of documenting the VFCP and in particular of identifying the impact of the community consultant model as a family violence reduction methodology. The research uses an appreciative inquiry methodology and this is discussed more fully in subsequent sections.

## TE AROHA NOA COMMUNITY SERVICES<sup>3</sup>

This section provides background on Te Aroha Noa. The organisation has been providing services and supports to people in Palmerston North for over 20 years. Given the focus of the VFCP on innovative practice, this section also considers other examples of innovation within Te Aroha Noa and discussion touches on the theoretical roots of the organisation's practice.

In the late 1980s the Central Baptist Church in Palmerston North wanted to find a way of translating its concern for people into action. It decided to provide the resources for the establishment of a Family Centre that would be located in the suburb of Highbury. Highbury was chosen because it was known to be an area that experienced a high level of social and economic deprivation and the Central Baptist Church wanted its service to be easily available to stressed families who might not be able to afford to travel to services located in the CBD or in wealthier suburbs. Thus, Te Aroha Noa began its journey. From the small beginnings of a Family Centre employing 2 staff, Te Aroha Noa has developed into an integrated Community Centre that employs 63 staff and 150 volunteers.

As time passed it added a diverse suite of group and individual programmes, responding to needs articulated by people from the surrounding neighbourhood and from staff. From the beginning Te Aroha Noa has had a vision of an inclusive and responsive service that supports local people to unleash their full potential. The goal is to encourage the growth of an entity that is a seamless web of relationships, rather than an organisation that employs staff to work with clients. Initiatives that intentionally break down barriers between people (staff and clients; parents and children; insiders and outsiders) are encouraged as are initiatives that take courage to execute. Te Aroha Noa believes that it is by pushing out the boundaries in relationships and in ideas, that deep lasting change can be achieved (Handley et al., 2009).

<sup>2</sup> See Warren-Adamson and Lightburn (2006) for a discussion of Community Centre practice.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Te Aroha Community Services see <http://www.tearohana.org.nz/>



In addition to the counselling that comprised its service beginnings; Te Aroha Noa now offers a range of therapeutic and whānau/family development programmes. These include outreach social work and community development programmes such as support to teen parents, the VFCP which is the focus of this report, a vulnerable young women's support programme and a range of activities designed to support men and boys. These services are available for the whole community. A second-hand shop was an early addition to Te Aroha Noa's activities and this provided low-cost clothing and household items to local families and whānau as well as providing a financial base for the development of the wider organisation for more than 20 years.

Development is a key concept at Te Aroha Noa. This can be seen in the way that services provided there have changed over time. An early playgroup has grown into a fully licensed and busy early childhood centre, a HIPPY programme, a young parent's support group and a local 'Incredible Years' Parenting Programme. Group and individual parenting programmes have grown out from the early commitment to supporting parents. Building on the educational focus, Te Aroha Noa now provides a range of adult educational opportunities including computer skills, art and literacy programmes that enable participants to develop various other skills and expertise that assist with gaining employment. In 2012 it begins another major phase of its growth with the development of a purpose-built adult and family education centre. This centre will house the current adult education initiatives and extend the current professional development opportunities being offered to social and community workers, early childhood practitioners, youth workers, mental health providers, counsellors, managers of NGOs, policy makers and researchers.

Te Aroha Noa has developed an active practice-based teaching programme. This involves contributions to academic and in-service development courses at Massey University's Social Work and Social Policy Programme and Practice Research and Professional Development Hub and also at the Bethlehem Tertiary Institute. More recently, it has developed a three-day intensive teaching programme based on the findings of research it conducted for the Families Commission (Handley et al., 2009) which trains practitioners already in-post in the art and science of transformative change<sup>4</sup>. Since 2004 Te Aroha Noa has made a commitment to building practice research capacity to advance its own capacity to innovate, and also to make a wider contribution to the development of social and community practice nationally and internationally. This report is one important product from this part of its work programme.

Over the past 20 years Te Aroha Noa has refined its approach to fostering a learning community so that the parents and children of the Highbury community come to the Centre to grow in confidence and in their capacity to create a safe, supportive and dynamic community. It is now an integrated Community Centre (Lightburn & Sessions, 2006; Warren-Adamson, 2001) grounded in the rich and diverse culture of Highbury. Te Aroha Noa identifies itself as part of a growing international movement that is based upon building local responses to locally-identified needs. Community Centres have been identified internationally as promising sites for the delivery of comprehensive services that take active account of the context within which families using the services are located (Berry et al. 2006; Lightburn and Warren-Adamson 2006; Munford et al., 2006, 2010; Palacio-Quintin 2006; Warren-Adamson 2006; Zeira 2006). The Community Centre has been identified as holding potential for successfully supporting fragile families in stretched communities where violence seems to be one recurring factor that undermines wellbeing (Leviten-Reid 2007).

As noted above, Te Aroha Noa has focused intentionally on developing practice in response to the twin imperatives of locally-articulated need and internationally recognised best practice. It actively seeks innovation and development as ways of ensuring it remains responsive to local people. The blending of early childhood, child development, individual counselling, community development, community-based social work and adult education all delivered from a locally-situated Community Centre places it at the forefront of practice development. Staff are actively committed to developing practice and to reflecting upon the way in which they engage with local whānau and families.

Te Aroha Noa has recently articulated its theory of practice (*The Spinaflex Effect: developing a theory of change for communities*. Handley et al. 2009). As noted in that document, the theoretical foundations of practice draw upon four major traditions. Structural theories (see, for example, Giddens, 1984) link the individual to the wider socio-political context. Structural theories require practitioners to consider how factors in that wider socio-political environment interact with matters that individuals can control to shape both their circumstances and their responses. These theories focus attention on the way that power relationships at all levels in a community can limit family and whānau potential and shape what is possible within communities. It calls upon workers to engage with policy-making at a local, national and international level when these are understood to damage or undermine the capacity of families, whānau and neighbourhoods to care well for their members.

---

<sup>4</sup> for further information on the professional development courses now offered by Te Aroha Noa see <http://www.tearohanoa.org.nz>



Artwork created for the publication *The Spinafex Effect: Developing a Theory of Change for Communities*.

Ecological perspectives also inform the work undertaken at Te Aroha Noa. These perspectives encourage practitioners to think in terms of nested sets of relationships that exist at different levels and in different systems (micro, macro, meso, and exo), and to recognise the ways in which differing levels and types of relationships shape the approach to finding solutions. Bronfenbrenner (1979), is widely recognised as being the first to articulate a clear ecological theory that could guide practice. Thinking of relationships and processes as operating at different levels connects ecological thinking to structural analysis. Te Aroha Noa also draws upon educational theories. In particular, the Frierean (see for example, Friere, 1985) approach to education as emancipation and liberation is critical at Te Aroha Noa. Everyone at Te Aroha Noa is simultaneously a teacher and a learner. This means that everyone can be engaged in creating change because everyone has something of value to contribute. As one of the staff who became involved in the project observed:

*I noticed that the community consultants were able to tell their stories in front of everybody which was very cool. Then as time went on*

*I could see that the consultants would have looked at the people who work at Te Aroha Noa as being the experts but then in the VFCP I'm not sure that they saw us that way, They just took over a bit and felt comfortable to tell their stories. The community consultants, are not worried whether you have ten degrees, they are just real people with real people. As long as you were just yourself and there was no pretence. 'you are a person and I'm a person and let's just share our information, let's do this together.' That was the hope. [Staff interview, 2011].*

Strengths-based approaches also inform the approach taken at Te Aroha Noa. The approaches are collaborative, transparent and respectful. Strengths perspectives help workers to look widely around whānau and families, learning about the things that they do well and harnessing these things to work on the challenges they face. The strengths perspective recognises that whānau and families create change, and that practitioners are not necessarily the only or even the most important experts in these processes (Sanders & Munford, 2010; Saleebey 1997, 2006).

Finally chaos theory, elaborated in the publication 'The Spinafex Effect' (Handley 2009) defined how positive change could be stimulated in situations characterised by uncertainty and unpredictability. Complexity theory moves beyond explanations of change based on simple cause-and-effect thinking and that use reductionist, atomistic approaches to understanding phenomena, replacing them with organic, non-linear and holistic approaches (Santonus, 1998, p. 3) where understanding relationships within interconnected and interdependent networks are fundamental to explanations (Morrison, 2005, p 316).

Concepts from complexity theory that have particular relevance to the work of Te Aroha Noa are; the non-proportional relation between cause and effect or, as it applies in social work, the notion that small initial inputs can have large effects later. Sensitivity to initial conditions reminds practitioners that the quality of early contact by families with the agency is important; the welcome they receive can set the tone for all subsequent interactions with agency staff. A final concept which is important in complexity theory and which had particular resonance in the Te Aroha Noa theory of change is the fundamental significance of relationships (Sanders, Munford & Liebenberg, 2011).

## LITERATURE – SETTING A CONTEXT FOR THE PROJECT

"It takes a village to raise a child" - an aphorism repeated across time that speaks to the critical connection between the wellbeing of the most vulnerable and the somewhat amorphous and slippery idea of *community* as a reagent that can somehow promote positive outcomes. The statement calls to mind the concept of 'community' as a positive bulwark against modern social evils; a foil we can rely on to, somewhat magically, fix damaged social structures and from there to contribute to wellbeing. However, equally, community, like family, can be the place where damage is done – the place of last resort that fails us (Sabol et al., 2004, p. 327). While compelling in its simplicity, the aphorism is unhelpfully silent about the things that the village needs to do to raise the child. How might the village be of use when we seek to stop family violence? Are there lessons we can learn from a century of research and programme development that has focused upon expanding our understanding of the intersection between the individual and the collective?

Recognition of the distressingly high incidence and prevalence of family violence in our communities is not new. Research spans back over a century into family and community violence and into programmes and other responses that might ameliorate its impact and deal with perpetrators.

Barner and Carney (2011), for instance, in their review of the development of the field of intimate partner violence identify early legislative efforts to provide protection for spouses who were subject to partner violence in the United States dating back to the beginning of the 20th century. It took to the middle of last century, however, for consistent recognition of the extent and impact of domestic violence to come to public consciousness and for public policy to begin to consider how to both respond effectively to incidents of family violence and to develop programmes that might reduce its prevalence (Sabol et al., 2004, p. 236). For decades now family violence has been part of public consciousness and along with this has been the recognition that, unlike many other forms of abuse and neglect that often concentrate in distressed neighbourhoods, it is spread relatively evenly across social strata (Sabol et al., 2004, p. 328-9).

Although much research on family violence has focused upon stressed or disadvantaged communities, Lynch and Wiersma (2001) note that spousal abuse is not concentrated in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Family dynamics, in particular recent separation of parents/partners, rather than socio-economic factors have the strongest relationship with incidents of domestic violence. There are, however, links between type of locality and other types of violence, particularly child abuse and neglect (Coulton and Korbin, 2007; Coulton et al., 2007). Because they have the potential to break down the social barriers that allow whānau/family violence in its many manifestations to survive, community-level initiatives that increase the number and range of opportunities for neighbours and neighbourhoods to interact together can contribute to violence reduction/elimination efforts regardless of the 'type' of neighbourhood in which they are located (Wilson et al., 2010).

While there is an impressive body of research into family violence internationally and a diverse range of programmes addressing its consequences, our understanding about how to reduce or eliminate it is still in its infancy. Beginning with a focus on individuals, research initially sought to understand family violence within a psychopathological framework (Bowen, et al., 2000, p. 4-5; Sabol et al., 2004, p. 327; Gelles, 1992). This focus generated programmes that primarily worked at the individual level. More recently, attention has taken a broader remit and the social ecology of violence has come into clearer focus (Aisenberg & Herrenkohl, 2008; Sabol et al., 2004). Here consideration of social structural issues, and the ways in which behaviours among individuals are shaped by interactions and forces at a range of levels from the micro to the macro (Coulton et al., 2007, p.1119; Sabol et al., 2004, p.330-331) have been examined. Alongside these newer understandings, programmes have developed that pay attention to more complex



processes, and interactions at varying levels have come in and out of focus. Notable among these types of approaches that broadly fit under the general rubric of 'community level interventions' are programmes that take either a social marketing approach seeking to directly change individual behaviour by putting a human face on violence and then providing information regarding how to go about getting support; or programmes that improve the co-ordination among professionals and organisations that work with families in various ways (Mancini, et al., 2006; Post, et al., 2010; Chan, et al., 2009).

---

**T**his work grows out of the recognition that family violence is likely to occur when there are tensions within family relationships that are aggravated by the absence of community support and where violence is seen as normative.

---

There is a smaller, emerging literature (Bowen et al., 2000; Mancini et al., 2006) that takes a neighbourhood-level focus and which is beginning to explore the contribution that community development approaches might make to family violence reduction/elimination. This work grows out of the recognition that family violence is likely to occur when there are tensions within family relationships that are aggravated by the absence of community support and where violence is seen as normative, that is; where family relationships are nested within a set of social relationships that condone or accept violence (Bowen et al., 2000; Mancini et al., 2006). Neighbourhood and community-level activities are thought to generate energy, resources, creativity and good will among citizens (Mancini et al., 2006, p. 203) that enhance community-level resilience. The 'public service announcement' approach to community-based prevention initiatives, such as the social marketing campaigns referred to above, is rejected as being too passive. Instead 'active, network oriented prevention efforts' (p. 204) are favoured. Locally-based, network-activating initiatives would seem to have some support in the evaluation literature as well. For instance, Post et al. (2010) found no appreciable change in reported levels of intimate partner violence in a significant, randomised controlled trial of community violence prevention initiatives that involved a combination of social marketing and strengthening networks among professionals. This initiative did not involve any direct activation of local networks or support systems among community members, but rather focused on 'educating' them through media campaigns and upon enhancing the functioning of inter-professional networks. Mancini and colleagues

(2006) note that what is often missing from such initiatives is effort to activate the informal social networks which tie people to places and which provide them with daily support. Rather than seeing the private sphere of intimate familial relationships as too difficult to penetrate and thus to change, they consider them permeable (p. 208) and subject to community influence.

Over many years Chaskin and colleagues (2001) and Sampson (2001) have investigated the characteristics of effective communities and identified that geographic identity and social organisation are important. Thus these are factors that need to be taken into account when seeking to activate the idea of 'community' for social changes such as violence reduction. The connection to geography includes recognition of natural boundaries, shared history and demographic patterns. Chaskin and colleagues (2001) also draw attention to factors such as the presence of industry and organisations that are located in an area. In addition to these features, which are relatively easy to document, are factors such as shared interests and social characteristics (that include, *inter alia*, language, culture, customs, local political processes). These factors combine to create unique geographic areas that are inhabited by people who may identify themselves with this place. When thinking about violence reduction/prevention initiatives any of these factors can constitute a functional element (Mancini et al. 2006, p. 209) that can be drawn upon as a resource for change. For example, as political entities, communities can marshal resources to lobby for change by engaging with local authorities, the police and other institutions. The physical nature of a community creates a context for certain types of social interaction and can inhibit other forms of citizen engagement. For instance, the location of parks and other public resources can allow children and parents to come together outside of households, and other public spaces can make it easier for citizens to meet to address local issues. These can all become visible markers of identity and belonging (Mancini et al., 2006, p.209) and they all play a role in shaping the lives of the residents; they are therefore all factors that must be taken account of in prevention/elimination initiatives. The following quotation from an interview with a staff member identifies the success of the VFCP was in part due to the groundwork over several decades that Te Aroha Noa had undertaken in the community building positive relationships and functional networks among neighbours:

*As with Treasuring our Tamariki. The previous groundwork of community meetings engaging residents in redevelopment and building a gazebo in Farnham Park created relationships which also made it possible to address local issues of violence; by developing the Lounging in the Park [Staff interview, 2011].*



However, neighbourhood is not always the organising principle for people's social networks. In a modern world networks grow and flourish without the need for proximity and so when thinking about the value of a neighbourhood-based approach to family violence prevention it is critical that the nature of the specific locality is understood, particularly in terms of whether or not locality is an organising principle that makes sense in the social and relational networks of residents (Sabol et al., 2004). Sometimes creative strategies can be adopted around particular issues, such as family violence, that breakdown local silences in communities. The extract below is one participant's reflection upon a *community conversation* around violence that was created after the VFCP had finished and shows the impact of the VFCP on other community processes<sup>5</sup>:

***The loudspeaker which was used for 'Lounging in the Park' worked in such a way as people several kilometres away could hear what was being said. Recording of the presentation which was posted on You Tube and several Group Facebook pages took the event to a larger audience [Staff interview, 2011].***

There are other issues to be aware of when thinking about activating local networks to address violence. Pattillo-McCoy (1999) found when normative social institutions and wider community level networks did not have a presence in neighbourhoods, others, such as gang members, drug dealers and violent individuals filled the void and achieved a degree of control over neighbourhood-level interactions. Like many interactional processes, if uninterrupted over time (Bowen et al., 2000, p.11) these can become self-reinforcing vicious cycles, or in Crane's (1991) terms 'epidemics' wherein problems spread 'like a contagion once a certain level of community vulnerability is reached' (Bowen et al., 2000, p. 11). Wilson's (1996) work is relevant in this regard because it found that while there were many strong networks in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, these were not able to contribute to the development of strong community-level functioning because they were isolated from wider societal networks and institutional resources. Thus, while informal, locality-based networks are important in ecological terms when seeking to address family violence, it is important to not lose sight of the fact that these networks can also be maladaptive, unavailable or not well integrated into networks and resources that extend beyond the locality (Korbin, 1998; Thompson, 1995). When thinking of neighbourhood level actions that might reduce violence, the risk that such initiatives will also bring together the ingredients that can increase its prevalence needs to be borne in mind:

**changes in the environment can increase either the number of motivated offenders or capable guardians of children (Sabol et al., 2004, p. 327).**

There is debate within the community-based initiatives literature about the extent to which neighbourhoods, or more specifically the social networks among individuals who reside in proximity to each other, can be used as a mechanism for reducing whānau/family violence because of the double edged sword that local relationships and networks embody – they can be both enabling of change and highly resistant to it (Bellair, 1997; Morenoff et al., 2001; Sabol et al., 2004, p. 324). For example, it has been observed that despite the fact that residents in many poor neighbourhoods are tightly connected through networks of kin and friendship, these ties do not always produce the collective resources that contribute actively to pro-social responses to violence. Furthermore there are examples of neighbourhoods where shared pro-social norms and expectations exist but where there are not thick social ties among neighbours (Sampson, Morenoff & Earls, 1999). Building on Furstenberg and Hughes' (1997) work on neighbourhood influences on children's wellbeing, Mancini and colleagues (2006) offer the concept of social organisation as a force with potential for violence prevention. Social organisation refers to the ways in which people in a community interrelate, co-operate and provide mutual support. It includes social support norms, social controls that regulate behaviour and interaction patterns, and the networks that operate in a community (p. 209).

In this respect, initiatives seeking to reduce/eliminate family violence need to take account of the patterns of local social organisation as this is the primary resource for change. Social organisation is a particularly important element in any community-building initiative (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1997; Mancini et al., 2003; Sampson, 2001). Sampson (2001, p.8) defines social organisation as the 'ability of a community structure to realise the common values of its residents and maintain effective social controls'.

Understanding local patterns of social organisation is an essential prerequisite to successful violence prevention initiatives because such initiatives need to build upon these patterns. Sampson (2001, p. 8) has argued that people's expectations of community life are critical aspects of social organisation:

**One of the most central of such common goals or ends is the desire of community residents to live in orderly environments free of predatory crime.**

<sup>5</sup> The Lounging in the Park initiative is discussed more fully later (see Distal Effects – Community Voice).

Strong ties among residents, or high levels of social organisation, alone are not sufficient to prevent violence. There is a linked need for effective social control mechanisms that are well integrated at both formal and informal levels (Sabol et al., 2004, p. 325). This dual focus is important; mutuality/support as well as the establishment and patrolling of pro-social norms is necessary for effective community based violence-prevention programmes (Bowen et al., 2000; Coulton et al., 2007; Mancini et al., 2006; Sabol et al., 2004).

The literature is clear, then that initiatives at the neighbourhood level need to include both network building and social control components in a more or less tailored way that takes account of the local social geography of the area (Bursik, 1999; Korbin et al., 2000; Sabol et al., 2004). Violence prevention initiatives at the neighbourhood level thus need to include effective strategies that connect individuals and their social networks to neighbourhood and community networks and from there to wider societal level social controls and resources. Here the emphasis is upon initiatives that actively and directly engage residents in prevention efforts and that connect residents' own natural/informal networks across neighbourhoods and with wider community-based resources. This literature draws on concepts such as community capacity, community efficacy and community readiness – the characteristics of communities that increase the likelihood that violence will not be tolerated and people will be supported to make change.

---

**T**he emphasis is upon initiatives that actively and directly engage residents in prevention efforts and that connect residents' own natural/informal networks across neighbourhoods and with wider community-based resources.

---

Gelles (1992), for instance, proposed an ecological framework for understanding family violence that would take account of the child, the parent, the family, the social situation in which they were located and the community. While Bursik and Grasmick (1993) identified that programmes at a locality level needed to take account of three interconnected levels of social organisation: the private (familial relationships), the parochial (neighbourhood relationships) and the state (government and its manifestations at both local and national levels).

In a similar way to the approach taken by Mancini and colleagues (2006), Sabol et al. (2004, p. 329-330) argue for a comprehensive violence prevention approach that develops community capacity and builds community social control. Building on Putnam's work, they suggest a need to focus upon increasing the potential number and quality of interactions between people in neighbourhoods, regardless of whether there are pre-existing bonds:

**Successful collaboration in one endeavour builds connections and trust-social assets that facilitate future collaboration in other, unrelated tasks (Putnam, 1993, p. 37).**

In contrast, Sampson et al. (1999) have argued that shared expectations regarding social control can be achieved in a community without the presence of strong social ties among neighbours. They argue (1997, 1999) that collective efficacy can facilitate social control regardless of strong local social ties. However, they define collective efficacy as a shared trust in social processes and a shared willingness to take action in response to matters such as violence. This in itself would seem to require a high level of confidence among residents in their own capacity to have an impact through their actions, a similarly high level of confidence in each other and, furthermore, confidence that state systems of social control will react appropriately when called upon to provide backup. It is difficult to conceive of a neighbourhood where these three factors would be present in the absence of strong social ties among neighbours. On balance, then, it does appear that the building of strong social bonds at a local level and the connection of these to wider social processes and resources (including social control) are keys to any effective community-based family violence reduction initiatives.

Much like Bowen and colleague's (2000) contagion argument, Sabol et al. (2004) suggest that once patterns of positive social behaviour are established in a neighbourhood, new members are more likely to adopt pro-social behaviours and attitudes through the informal interactional processes that operate within the neighbourhood; local social practices nurture the development of further social capital in the neighbourhood (Zaccaro et al., 1995) and also provide a locally-based foundation for formal and informal mechanisms of social control. The literature on neighbourhood-based interventions argues consistently for a combination of network-enhancing activities that build social cohesion and for social control that operates in both formal and informal ways.





Celebrate Highbury is an event that affirms the rich resources of it's residents and grows a positive, and vibrant community. Creative strategies can be adopted around particular issues such as family violence that breakdown local silences in communities.







Neighbourhoods remain a relatively untapped resource for combating family violence.

Neighbourhoods, then, remain a relatively untapped resource for combating family violence. Informal, local networks continue to operate when the formal providers, such as community nurses, the local doctor, teachers or community-based social service providers leave at the end of the day and at the weekend, and it is these same networks that are the repositories of local knowledge and of shared norms. This is the knowledge into which violence prevention programmes need to tap in order to create lasting change (Sabol et al., 2004, p. 334). The critical issue is understanding how the informal networks that operate at neighbourhood levels can be best used to facilitate reductions in family violence. The ways in which these networks may be activated might vary across neighbourhoods (Mancini et al., 2006; Bowen et al., 2000) and this means that responses may need to be tailored to a greater or lesser extent to fit local conditions. However, there appear to be some general principles that can be used to guide the development of locality-based programmes.

The social disorganisation and social capital literatures identify mechanisms that reflect a community's capacity to prevent violence. Specifically, when people feel a stake in conformity and in local mainstream organisations, and the community norms are predominantly pro-social the propensity for violence is reduced (Sabol et al., 2004, p. 325). Accordingly, creating conditions under which individuals feel connected to their neighbourhood would seem to be a promising site for attention. In this regard, Aisenberg and Herrenkohl (2008, p. 299-305) found that community institutions such as schools could function as effective buffers in promoting resilience in children exposed to violence. Social ties (Sabol et al., 2004) have the power to reinforce pro-social behaviours and attitudes. While the vesting of resources locally, so that people in the neighbourhood are able to easily access supports that encourage non-violent

behaviours and attitudes, can participate in decision making about matters that affect their lives and have confidence in the state mechanisms of social control, is an important strategy in community-based prevention programmes (Mancini et al., 2004, p. 211). Holding resources locally is critical because solutions to local problems ultimately require the activation of local people. The closer resources are to neighbourhoods the greater the chance they will be able to be used in ways that are meaningful and relevant to local people. This in turn increases social bonding and social density creating the potential for virtuous rather than vicious circles.

Mancini et al. (2006) argue for family violence prevention efforts to intentionally focus upon activating informal social networks within communities and to stop concentrating their efforts upon resourcing and changing formal organisations and systems. Bringing citizens together creates opportunities for enhancement of resilience at a community level (Mancini et al., 2006). In this process energy, resources, and creativity are released and goodwill is fostered among citizens. A focus on local activation of networks also draws resources into communities and retains them there in ways that increase the likelihood that they will be meaningful and accessible to local people (Ungar, 2011). It is these processes that facilitate resilience enhancement because they generate locally relevant responses rather than one-size fits all models into which individuals then have to fit themselves. Mowbray et al. (2007) suggest that key community level resources that enhance residents' abilities to adapt in positive ways to risks such as family violence are social capital, institutional resources and economic resources. Initiatives that create a high volume of opportunities for local people to come together in a range of forums, to interact and to build trusting social bonds are thought to be important (Mancini et al., 2006; Sabol et al., 2004). Echoing Sampson et al. (1997; 1999), Sabol et al. (2004, p. 323) conceptualised community capacity to prevent violence in terms of social interactions that led to shared trust and capacity for action. The more numerous the opportunities for people in neighbourhoods to come together in settings that had a pro-social agenda, the greater were the chances for learning constructive and positive interactional behaviours, for building supportive relationships and from there the possibilities for the development of social efficacy were increased. Benefits that accrued were reductions in social isolation and the fortress effect that family violence creates (Sabol et al., 2004, p. 327) as well as the learning of positive, non-violent methods of problem solving. Social bonding and social density led to the creation of social capital. This is the capacity of groups of people within neighbourhoods to work together to solve problems and to generate wellbeing-enhancing resources. Bursik and Grasmick (1993) argue that all local institutions and



organisations, such as schools and community groups are resources for social integration and thus should be considered when planning programmes.

In terms of being able to mobilise community capacity at the neighbourhood level as a force for prevention initiatives there is a need to:

- Identify and support a local team of leaders who share a sense of ownership and vision,
- Engage local people in the development of a plan,
- Provide infrastructure and support for programme delivery (Mancini et al., 2006).

The idea of activating community capacity to address family violence is not a feel good exercise; it is about encouraging an active but careful balancing of emotional support and bonding within a context of mutually agreed behavioural constraints that are policed in a variety of ways from within-group opprobrium to direct state intervention through the police and/or judicial system. It is about the combination of social care and social control that draws upon both informal and formal networks and institutions (Mancini et al., 2006; Sabol et al., 2004). Achieving violence-free communities is a long term project that requires attention to long term therapeutic intervention with individuals and families in addition to the work done on building community efficacy (Blau & Long, 1999; Sabol et al., 2004).

In summary, there is a significant body of literature now on violence including its antecedents, causes and sequelae, its tendency to consolidate into intergenerational patterns and to produce large and small ripple effects among those who experience and witness it and on the relationship between levels of violence and factors such as neighbourhood characteristics. It is clear that part of its power is its capacity to silence those most affected and to encourage the misplacing of responsibility onto its victims also minimising its visibility at a societal level. It is clear that it is insidious and that while wider social recognition has eventually emerged, understanding how to eliminate it has lagged. What seems clear is that prevention efforts need to occur on a wide range of fronts including, policy, legislation, individual intervention with victims and perpetrators as well as work on public attitudes (both overt and covert). However, little attention has been given to the way in which locally-based strategies create opportunities for people to understand the way that violence influences daily life in their communities and how these are connected with what happens within families. This project locates itself here.



Web Buster at work. A Violence Free Community Hui 2010.





traced some of the distal effects as well. The project plan is summarised in the diagram below. A researcher was based at Te Aroha Noa throughout the VFCP and she worked as a participant-observer in all aspects of the initiative. She was able to actively engage with the project as it developed and grew and in this way could play the role of a 'critical friend' reflecting back to participants, assisting with the completion of initiative tasks, particularly around the *community conversations*, and after the end of the formal life of the VFCP, she also returned to the key people involved in the initiative to have critically reflective conversations with them about any observed impacts of the initiative. She kept research fieldnotes throughout the project and completed interviews during the initiative as well as after its completion. Both primary and secondary data was to be used in this project. The bulk of this report is concerned with explaining how the initiative developed and with identifying any impacts it had on violence in the neighbourhood surrounding Te Aroha Noa. The discussion below thus draws heavily upon the records kept as the VFCP grew, on the research fieldnotes collected by the researcher located within the initiative and upon interviews she completed with key observers of the initiative. In order to produce a clear and detailed understanding of the initiative, wherever possible the research records are reproduced here.

## SECONDARY DATA

The research was fortunate in that as part of its own developmental process, the VFCP initiative collected detailed information on all of its meetings and Te Aroha Noa also had the part-time researcher noted above who collected detailed field observations of the initiative and actively participated in the public events and meetings. This provided the research with a rich source of secondary data from which a detailed reconstruction of the development of the initiative could be built. Overall detailed records from 68 meetings of staff and community consultants and reflective notes kept by the CEO as the initiative developed as well as summaries of each of the *community conversations* were analysed. Further, a research assistant attended all group meetings and all *community conversations* and kept her own set of fieldnotes throughout the project. Analysis paid particular attention to the identification of any impacts the initiative had upon reductions in levels of violence or changes in people's behaviour in reacting to violent incidents. In addition to this, the records were examined to allow for a reconstruction of the initiative including the way in which the community consultant model developed and the planning and execution of the *community conversations*. Finally, the records were examined to identify if any ripple effects could be detected in the project records from past initiatives in the Highbury community.

## PRIMARY DATA

Based on the information contained in the project records a range of individuals who became involved in the initiative were identified and those who retained ongoing involvement in the initiative, and thus who could be considered to be rich sources of data, were invited during 2011 to participate in a research interview to explore their experiences of the VFCP. Interviews were completed with 10 community members during the life of the initiative and interviews were also completed with 6 staff and 6 community consultants who participated throughout the initiative. These interviews were undertaken in 2011, the year after the last *community conversation* to allow time for people to reflect upon the initiative and to be able to comment knowledgeably about any impacts the VFCP had upon them. These interviews were analysed for themes primarily relating to impacts of the VFCP on reductions in levels of violence either in their own lives or the lives of the people around them that they could attribute to the VFCP. The interviews were also analysed for descriptive material about the VFCP.

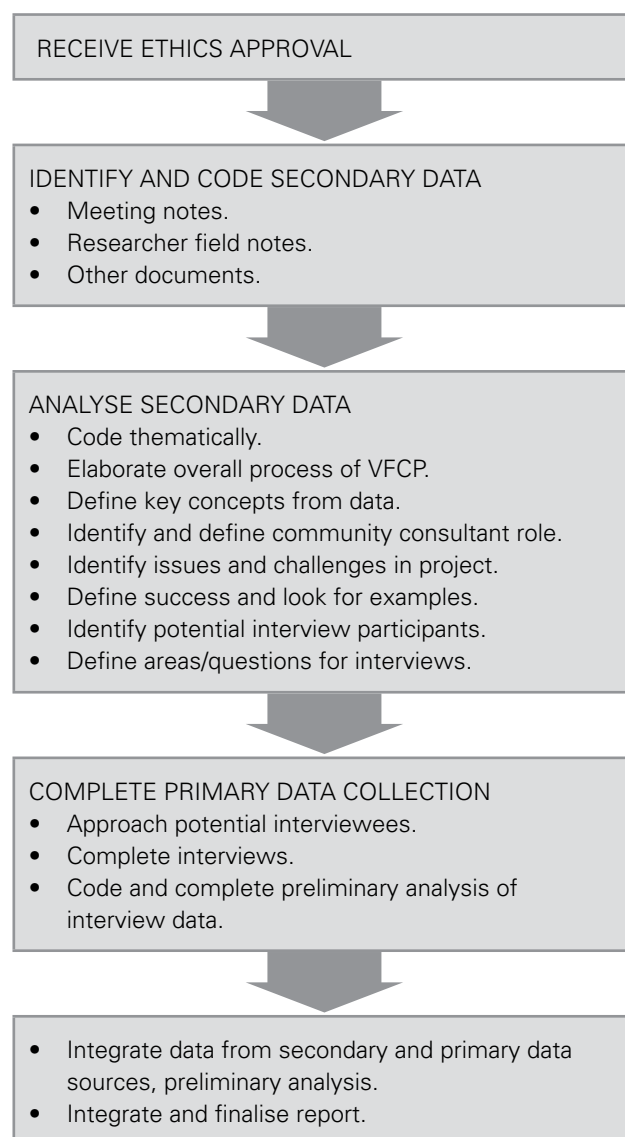


Figure 1: The Research Process



## ETHICAL ISSUES

Before the secondary data was accessed or any interviews were completed the research proposal was submitted to the Te Aroha Noa Ethics Committee for approval. This ensured that procedures adopted by the research protected all parties. Te Aroha Noa established an Ethics Committee as a Subcommittee of its Trust Board in 2010. Ethics issues had increasingly become apparent in both its growing research activities and also in some of the community initiatives it supports. The Ethics Committee now provides invaluable guidance to staff and community members and is a very locally-driven response to the needs within many community organisations to be able to secure ethical oversight for their activities when they sit at the boundary between practice and research and also when they seek to engage in research activity on their own account.

---

Community consultants, the real people that lived in the streets around the centre, were to play a central role in these family violence *community conversations*... *community conversations* that the community consultants led used the medium of real local stories...

---

## THE VFCP

In New Zealand initiatives to reduce/eliminate family violence have taken similar approaches to those documented in the international literature discussed above in that early efforts focused at the family and individual level and then latterly and comparatively recently attention has moved to efforts at local co-ordination of organisations and professionals and social marketing campaigns (Family and Community Services, 2006, p.6). For instance, the 'Its Not Ok' social marketing campaign was part of a wider set of initiatives that grew out of Te Rito – The New Zealand Family Violence Prevention Strategy initiated in 2002 that focussed on enhancing networks of providers as well as a large social marketing campaign aimed at shaping attitudes across the community and creating pathways through which individuals could access help. The social marketing campaign involved public figures, individuals who had perpetrated violence, and subsequently reformed, and those who had been victimised speaking their story publicly. In this it attempted to produce in mass media a 'local face' of violence; to humanise and personalise it and to encourage people to speak out. It also modelled techniques that citizens could use to ask people who may have been experiencing violence if they needed support. In this it sought to challenge the silencing power of violence. In these campaigns

the figures still remained remote, although their stories might have been powerful, the social distance between the general public and these figures remained and thus the ability for people to abstract violence – it happens somewhere else – also remained. Alongside this significant marketing campaign was a smaller set of initiatives designed to stimulate local innovation and responses at a community level. This was The Community Action Fund. This fund supported locally based innovative programmes that focused upon raising awareness and creating responsive community environments so that violence could be addressed.

While this was happening nationally, Te Aroha Noa was grappling with its own challenges around how it responded to the violence it was aware of in its own locality, in the lives of staff, in client-family networks and also in the families that lived in the neighbourhood. It had been working for many years with the consequences and survivors of violence and also to a lesser extent with perpetrators, and had been experimenting with the use of community-wide strategies. These community-wide strategies - *community conversations* – were events that brought people together to talk about issues, challenges and experiences and to identify things that they could do locally in response. It had held *community conversations* on both positive and negative issues. Regardless of the topic, it had observed that finding opportunities to bring people together always created change ripples around the neighbourhood (Handley et al. 2009). It was in this context then that the idea of trying to develop an initiative that converted the 'stories recounted by the changed individuals' as represented in the social marketing campaigns into a real local story recounted by a real person grew. Community consultants, the real people that lived in the streets around the centre, were to play a central role in these family violence *community conversations*.

This initiative was always intended to operate at a community development level. It was not an encounter group focused upon the healing of those who shared their stories. When this level of support was required it would be provided through other service lines within Te Aroha Noa, such as the counselling service or the social work and community outreach programmes, or through referral to other specialised services within the Palmerston North community. However, as the process unfolded it became apparent that in addition to a powerful community development tool, the *community conversations* also played a role in creating a healing space as people shared their traumatic stories and supported each other to understand what had happened to them. The *community conversations* that the community consultants led used the medium of real local stories to facilitate a process of critical reflection that would generate change and momentum among the residents of Highbury.



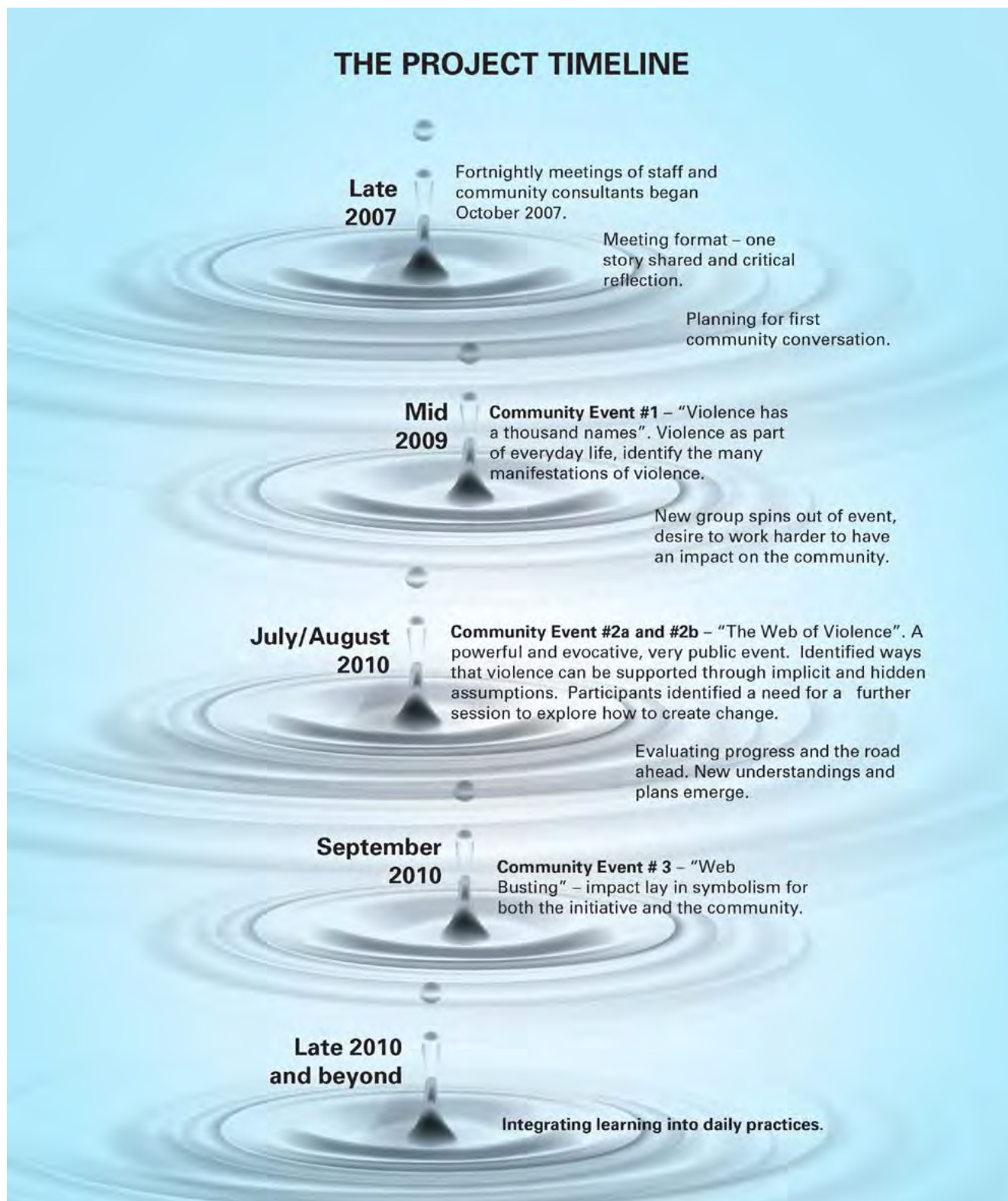


Figure 2: Project Timeline

## THE STORY OF THE INITIATIVE

Figure 2 (p.19) provides an outline of the way in which the initiative unfolded. The VFCP was an exploratory project and as noted above, it located itself between the two more traditional approaches to family violence reduction – social marketing campaigns seeking to shift attitudes primarily through the medium of public advertising (see for example; Family and Community Services, 2006,

p. 43), and intervention and therapeutic work with individuals affected by family violence (Post et al., 2010). In addition to achieving changes in levels of violence in the local neighbourhood, its goal was to assess how community organisations might be able to provide a safe forum where individuals could personally recount experiences of violence with the goal of stimulating community discussion about causes, consequences and strategies for violence elimination. Intense individual experiences,

recounted by community members in front of their neighbours in a carefully controlled set of conversations, then, were to provide the vehicle for stimulating change. The role of 'community consultant' was developed as part of this initiative – these were courageous individuals from the local community who, along with staff members from the community centre, worked on a fortnightly basis to understand their own stories by critically reflecting upon their experiences in a supported setting and then in pinpointing learning from these experiences that other people in the community might be able to use in their own lives to reduce violence. A staff member recounts her experience of coming together with people from the local community to explore family violence:

---

I'm a social worker working with families who may be going through family violence themselves; and a part of me is thinking that others may think is she good enough? Can she do this work if she has grown up in abuse and violence?

---

*I actually found it very hard to tell my story because of my work as a social worker. I guarded a lot of it so it was only snippets of my story; a lot of stuff I may not have talked about. I think there was a bit of fear around telling too much. I didn't fully expose myself in order to keep myself safe. I'm a social worker working with families who may be going through family violence themselves; and a part of me is thinking that others may think is she good enough? Can she do this work if she has grown up in abuse and violence? Has she got over it and has she dealt with it? We had a mixture of people sitting in there, even other staff; what would their perception of me be now they know this about me? It was a very hidden part of me. I don't feel it was as exposing as I thought it might be. I did find it hard in those groups to hear the stories but also knowing where my story was and also where I sat with my story. I think I sit a lot better with my story now and see it for what it is, what it was [Staff member, 2011].*

The community consultants were a critical part of this initiative. In this regard, Mancini and colleagues (2006) have observed that what has been missing in many family violence prevention initiatives is work that activates local community networks. For this reason, if lasting change is to be facilitated (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1997; Sampson, 2001) work is required with local social organisational structures and local people.

The VFCP explicitly targeted this area of action. At Te Aroha Noa the intentional involvement of members of the neighbourhood, the community consultants, was a central part of the initiative. One staff member recounts the early stages of the project, and the enjoyment about working together it engendered:

*Some of the highlights for me were the way the community consultants took over, because that is what they have had to do in life; they have had to take over life and try to make it work and they just kind of did. And of course I always remember the story of the cell phones; we all bought our dairies out and then asked, 'how are we all going to remember the next appointment?' And they all bring their cell phones out [Staff member, 2011].*

The community consultants acted as ambassadors – bringing their experience, knowledge and networks into the community centre, and then taking their learning from the initiative back to their networks, both through the medium of the events (the *community conversations*) and through their everyday lives. It will be appreciated that alongside this initiative ran an intense process of support for both staff and community consultants to deal with any personal impacts from the recounting of the stories, but the initiative was an outward looking series of conversations designed to provoke and support change within the community.

---

The community consultants acted as ambassadors bringing their experience, knowledge and networks into the community centre – then taking their learning from the initiative back to their networks.

---

Mancini et al. (2006) outline a process for establishing community-based violence reduction initiatives. Drawing on their own experience in managing community events and stimulating community change Te Aroha Noa identified a local team of leaders in the community consultants and staff who formed the core working group for the project. The regular meetings and the process of intense sharing facilitated the sense of ownership and shared vision. The *community conversation* methodology developed by Te Aroha Noa in other initiatives was refined for use in the VFCP in these group meetings. The process of building the *community conversations* required that local people actively engaged with the plan, both in terms of preparing for each event and also in terms of participating actively in the conversations. Te Aroha Noa made a commitment to provide infrastructure and support for the initiative and this support

was ongoing beyond the end of the funding. This process has strong parallels with the process advocated by Mancini and colleagues (2006).

The funding for the VFCP was available for one year. An examination of the records kept by the initiative indicates that it could be divided roughly into three stages (as identified in the diagram above) that eventually spanned three years. The project continued on beyond the initial funding period because of the internal momentum it had generated through the community consultant process. People from the neighbourhood around the Community Centre decided that after twelve months there was more work to be done, and asked that it continue. Te Aroha Noa decided to maintain its support for the initiative beyond the funding period. Using understandings developed in previous research (see for example, Handley et al., 2009) Te Aroha Noa recognised the importance of allowing the initiative to ripple outwards losing intensity at the centre but gaining momentum in other areas as it developed its own life in the community and in the individual practices of the staff and families involved. By the middle of 2010 the nature of the initiative had changed in that the learning from the intense period of *community conversations* had begun to be incorporated into daily practice at Te Aroha Noa and into the lives of the people who live in the local neighbourhood. This report traces both the development of the initiative over its lifespan and also these wider ripples that continued on beyond the life of the project.

Throughout its three-year lifespan project team members (staff and community consultants) met on a fortnightly basis. This was the forum for the sharing of stories, the critical reflection on those stories and for decisions to be made about how the initiative would develop. Reflection records kept as part of the initiative highlight the early processes:

*The first meeting 30/10/07 was the first tentative step in the process starting with brief introductions from the participants of why they were present. The participants were left with some key questions to reflect on, which questioned common beliefs around violence. The first stories participants told were catalysts for other participants to tell stories. When participants' experienced deep listening and respect of themselves and their stories they knew they were valued as people and were not being judged. The lack of judgement led to further deepening of the conversation which examined both the backward steps as well as the forward ones in the journey to being violence free [Research fieldnotes, 2008].*

Initially it was envisaged that there would be a fixed group membership primarily to protect individuals who were sharing painful and revealing experiences. However community consultants expressed a desire

for a more open membership of the group; violence thrives in silent spaces and it was felt that a group exploring violence had to be willing to be open. By early 2009, the records show that both staff and community consultants participated in the meetings and through this joint process of discovery a strong sense of belonging to this emergent process developed:

*The space to tell the story is compelling in so far as people are willing to listen deeply and not judge the teller of the story. Community consultants also come and go from the group yet they talk of a strong sense of belonging. They see themselves as part of the wider sense of family that group membership seems to create. The group is growing and they talk as though they have been coming to each session. We are getting a sense of what the project might be able to achieve and how that process actually works. It seems that the group provides an alternative audience to the usual friends and family. The group can see you in a different light and hold the dream of what could be. **Holding the hope when you can't hold the hope for yourself** [Research fieldnotes, 31 March 2009].*

Despite the fact that the group was not intended to serve a therapeutic function, as can be seen from the excerpt above, participants did nonetheless recognise that they gained new insights from participation and the relationships they built in the group gave them new lenses through which to see themselves. However, even though the focus was explicitly on using this methodology to potentiate change in the neighbourhood, it was also recognised that benefits would be gained for those participating in terms of mutuality and support and this would be a valuable outcome in itself because of the isolating effects of violence (Bowen et al., 2000; Coulton et al., 2007; Sabol et al., 2004). Indeed, as one of the goals of the project was to build community capacity to address violence when it occurred within the neighbourhood, it was important that the initiative was able to intensify social bonds, enhance the sense of belonging to this neighbourhood as a positive aspect of social life, and create the spaces where individuals could become stronger and more confident in their ability to have an effect on violence (Aisenberg & Herrenkohl, 2008; Mancini et al., 2006; Sabol et al., 2004). Through these sorts of strategies it was hoped to enhance the degree of readiness within the community as a whole to engage in wider change (Coulton et al., 2007).

One of the decisions made early in the process was that violence would be abstracted out from the people and places where it occurred. For example the reflection notes appear to personify violence – it is often spoken of as if it were an individual acting with intentionality. This was a deliberate strategy employed by Te Aroha Noa to allow people to talk more freely about something that was intensely



personal, possibly embarrassing and threatening. It also provided a means to examine it without blame which was seen as an important dimension of this project; if blame were to be laid, people might choose to stay away and the opportunity to draw on their experiences and to initiate change would be lost. This did not mean that the conversations diminished violence, as one of the community members noted:

*The meetings provided the place for pretty frank stuff to come out. People were a little reluctant at the start but once someone got the ball rolling, others opened up. Some found it hard to open up deep wounds when telling stories, and hearing the stories opened up old wounds in others. It was hard for some people to hear the stories and hear what they thought wasn't violence was in fact violence. They realised that 'I had that done to me' [Community member interview, 2011].*

The fluidity of group membership gave the project a sense of organic growth with circles of influence that expanded and contracted depending on whereabouts in the lifecycle of the initiative any particular meeting was located. For instance, membership typically expanded after *community conversations* (the public events) and then settled as the focus moved to continuing the exploration of violence and planning the next event. Planning and implementing the *community conversations* became important because these ensured a continued focus on generating energy and involvement of the local neighbourhood. Planning and holding events also kept the focus outwards, beyond the stories. A core of about 10-12 people, approximately half staff who came from different service lines within the organisation, and half community consultants met throughout the time.

---

Reflection notes appear to personify violence – it is often spoken of as if it were an individual acting with intentionality. This was a deliberate strategy employed by Te Aroha Noa to allow people to talk more freely about something that was intensely personal, possibly embarrassing and threatening. It also provided a means to examine it without blame which was seen as an important dimension of this project.

---

The meetings developed a rhythm with participants becoming deeply immersed in the story that was a focus for each meeting. Energy and effort was then required to lift attention to a reflective stance that



Violence Thrives in Silent Spaces.

considered what could be learned about violence, survival and change from this story. This critical reflective stance was essential to avoid the group becoming an encounter group. It was difficult and challenging for participants to lift the focus from what could be a deeply distressing narrative to consider what that story told about more general processes that surround violence and what could be done to create change in the wider community. Te Aroha Noa had built up a considerable experience base in using the Appreciative Inquiry method from previous projects (Handley et al., 2009) and was able to draw upon the expertise it had developed in using the appreciative audience/inquirer methodology in this project. By early 2008 the group had developed some techniques for managing the telling of traumatic stories and for ensuring the focus on reflection and action was retained. The personification of violence (mentioned above) as a strategy for managing difficult and traumatic stories can also be seen in the excerpt below:

*We have adopted the narrative therapy technique of outsider witness to help us support deepening of the story telling while keeping the story teller and listeners safe. We can see that this process retains the essence of the story at the same time as providing a way for others in the group to connect to the story in a personal and a reflective way. We can see that the conversations begun in the meetings continue during the smoko times when informal conversations carry on the reflection [Staff interview, 2009].*

*At the beginning of each meeting the story from the previous session is briefly reflected upon - What did we learn from the last story? What did violence teach me about life, about myself and what I need to do in Highbury? What skills did I learn when violence was around? During*



*those times when the stories were traumatic in the listening and it seemed as though we were being buried in the crap, we learned how to come up for air by using humour while holding the stories respectfully. Violence would want us to be buried in despair however humour provided light relief in the seriousness of the topic [Staff interview, 2009].*

*We can see that the process of sitting in a group, committing to share deeply the stories of violence, using appreciative inquiry to structure the sessions so that the story and the story teller are valued and we continue to be able to ask reflective questions helps to strengthen us to say 'enough is enough' and to begin to work out how to make changes in our own lives and the lives of people in our neighbourhood [Staff interview, 2008].*

By March 2009 reflection records note the development of the meetings:

*(Thinking about the 'haters' conversations) as the process has continued we note that the language has become more and more specific. The group discussion process has helped us to develop language and the confidence to describe our experiences and to speak about violence. As this capacity to use specific language to talk about violence has grown so has our ability to create more specific conversations about what is happening in the lives of the story tellers in a way that shows that we have grown in our understanding of the experience and effects of violence [VFCP project notes, 31/03/09].*

The 'haters' was a discussion that developed around one young mother's reflections upon her journey. She recognised that she had progressed from having her life determined by powerful people around her to a point where she was able to bravely act on her own and clearly articulate how she wanted things to be for herself and her children. She reflected upon the realisation that she was able to take control over her life and shape her own experiences and those of her children:

*Haters are people who are stuck in the mud, they don't like people progressing and following their own path. **Haters are people that hold you back.** I'm not living my life for them anymore, I'm living it for the kids and myself. Haters don't really play a part in my eyes anymore, well they shouldn't, but they were. They were holding me back, not physically holding me back but I felt stuck. So instead of pleasing them now I'm pleasing me. [Community consultant interview, 2009].*

---

**W**e had named and defined violence, we had talked about the many ways it shaped our lives and who we are and we knew that its power was in the silence it breeds. So the question we asked was 'how do we bring the community into this journey now that we are strong enough to talk about it openly?'

---

Even when it was painful for the story-teller to recount, or for participants to listen, the group commitment to the story as a vehicle for wider change was maintained and the decision to personify violence- to make it into a someone separate from the protagonists in the story, helped to keep focused on the story as a vehicle for wider change. The temptation to become drawn into the story was understood to reflect the silence that sustains violence, this meant that group members had to learn to resist the power of violence to drain energy for change away by, in this case, being drawn into the individual story and losing the focus on the learning that could be abstracted from it. Maintaining the focus on the story as a vehicle for change in other people's lives rather than the story as learning and change for the story teller was difficult. Over time group members developed strategies for enabling them to empathetically hear the story and care for the story teller, while at the same time focusing on the broader messages the story held for others. In this way they could retain the focus on the original kaupapa of the initiative which was to learn how to move beyond individual pain to have an impact on others while also caring for the story teller. Others have noted (see for example, Samson et al., 1997; 1999) that increasing the number and range of positive, change focused interactions between people within a neighbourhood builds social capital (Zaccaro et al., 1995) and this can have a multiplier effect on capacity of the whole neighbourhood to address complex and confronting issues such as violence. The Chief Executive of Te Aroha Noa explains how the next phase of the initiative unfolded:

*We came to the point where we wanted to work out how we could push the initiative further – to move beyond individual stories and critical reflection within the confines of the group. We reflected that we had shared our stories and reflected critically on them, we had become a group who now knew each other and felt safe together, and we knew very full stories. We had named and defined violence, we had talked about the many ways it shaped our lives and who we are and we knew that its power was in the silence it breeds. So the question we asked was 'how do we bring the community into this journey now that we are*



Cowardness. Take ownership of your  
 Names  
 Disguise  
 Alcohol/Drugs  
 Excuses to normalized  
 Intimidation Arguing  
 labelled. Having to win  
 Bullying Providing  
 Fear. Body language  
 LOVE Disguises  
 Rejection itself  
 Losing control Powerlessness  
 Possession Cultural/Religious  
 Obsession Expectations  
 Insecurity Community Culture.  
 Manipulation  
 Assumptions  
 Neglect  
 Mental Abuse  
 Sexual Abuse  
 Confused

Impact.  
 Long term effects on  
 memory  
 Powerful Triggers  
 Scarred for life.  
 Shame/Blame  
 Depression.  
 Walking on eggshells.  
 Influenced by past cycle  
 Self inflicted harm  
 Drugs/alcohol  
 Affects schooling  
 Become really emotional  
 Confused

Finding our own  
 courage/power.  
 Nuggets  
 Don't want my children to  
 be like me.  
 Breaking the cycle.  
 I am someone not  
 something  
 Face Reality  
 I am Free  
 Finding an inner  
 Strength  
 Enough is enough  
 Awareness.  
 Learning to talk  
 emotionally  
 Sharing our stories  
 Learning to trust  
 Be open  
 Have to want to change  
 It's all about a kids  
 See the good coming out of  
 Courage has a  
 Thousand names

Bruises can go  
 away - but internal  
 bruising

Violence has 1000 Names Hui.



*strong enough to talk about it openly?’ We knew from other work we had done in the past that well executed community events could be powerful agents for positive change, and we had quite a lot of experience in undertaking these sorts of initiatives. We were working with the idea of telling stories and then having reflective conversations and it was here that the idea of events as ‘family violence community conversations’ was born [CEO interview, 2011].*

The critical reflective stance the initiative took to violence was also applied to the project itself; members kept asking themselves and each other whether the project was staying true to its kaupapa and whether or not the project should continue. Project records document some of the comments group members made between 2007 and 2009 about the group and its development:

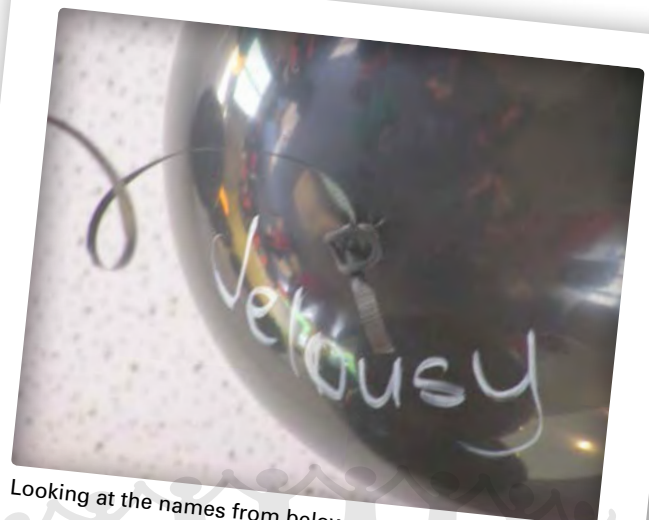
*The people who attended the group supported the emerging new stories of changing the culture of violence. Specific comments by group members include:*

- *Even my speaking out here is standing against violence [VFCP project notes, 24/7/08].*
- *Sharing stories and hearing stories of success showed different ways to cope without telling people what to do [VFCP project notes, 21/08/08].*
- *Change one person, begin to change a community. Change begins to happen for a family when they notice another family doing well. One woman would want people to look at her family in that way and to pass this on through the generations [VFCP project notes, 21/8/08].*
- *Shifting the focus from looking at the ground (head bowed) to having a big picture in sight (with head held high), stops going backwards. ‘I can taste the future’. The big picture gets us through the stuff of the present [VFCP project notes, 31/03/09].*

By early 2009 project records indicate a growing interest in enlarging the influence of the group beyond members and family networks:

*The future of the group was discussed again. How do we continue? How do we take it out further into the community? What is the purpose of the group? [VFCP project notes, 2/06/2009].*

Recognising that increasing the number and quality of interactions between people in neighbourhoods can encourage an increase in pro-social behaviour and a heightened sense of connection to the locality (Sabot et al., 2004) thereby increasing the overall safety of the neighbourhood, the idea of having community-wide conversations seemed to hold potential for widening the influence of the project. The *community conversation* was a public, creative



Looking at the names from below was like seeing violence from a different perspective.  
Violence Has 1000 Names Hui, 2009.



event where local people could come together to explore the different ways in which violence impacted upon their lives and to identify strategies for supporting each other to work towards a violence-free life. The first *community conversation* was called “Violence has a Thousand Names” and it took place in August 2009. It was based around an idea which had emerged from the fortnightly meetings that violence is a secret and it survives through silence; it is given many names to minimise its harm and divert attention from the damage it does.

*Violence has a thousand names was, I think, more about people beginning to identify that the spectrum of violence was a lot larger than the physical abuse that we assume violence is. Using this phrase opened up conversation to think about the subtlety of violence in the sanitised names. The focus was getting people to identify the violence that was present in their lives [Research fieldnotes, 2009].*

---

Violence is a secret and it survives through silence; it is given many names to minimise its harm and divert attention from the damage it does.

---

This *community conversation* was an attempt to bring violence out into the open by identifying all the sanitised names used to cover it up, and to do this publicly in the Te Aroha Noa Gathering Space. The VFCP project records illuminate how this event emerged out of the regular meetings. This excerpt is taken from the reflective records of November and December 2007:

*One of the most significant points was identifying the phrase ‘Violence has a thousand names’. It was at this point that one of the participants connected with the reality of violence in their own life and realised that control was one of the names of violence [VFCP project notes, 14/11/07]. Later, another group member connected with the idea of violence having a thousand names when she said ‘my eyes were opened’ [VFCP project notes, 6/12/07].*

*Here participants began moving from the denial of violence by calling it other things, to permission to recognise it and then find their own solutions through the conversations within the group. There was also movement from seeing this as a problem to be hidden, to seeing that community can be part of the support system that will encourage you to become who you want to be. The power of setting an example and realising people are listening to you was also seen as being connected to the need to call violence by its own name; it was*

*something to do with being real and true to ourselves and not allowing other definitions of ourselves to dominate and control [Research fieldnotes, 2010].*

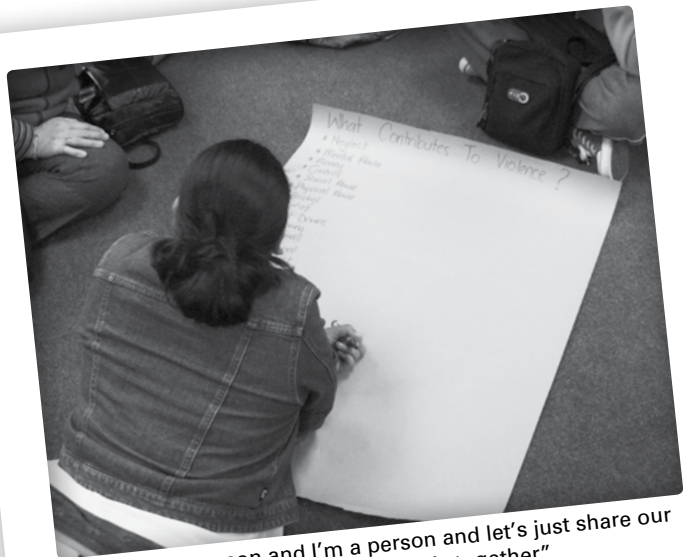
---

Make the event creative and engaging while at the same time not diluting the focus on violence.

---

The conversation was a creative event that provided a space to talk openly, publicly and safely about the insidious nature of violence. The group became the project team and for three months meetings developed a dual focus; continuing with the narrative and critical reflections and adding in project planning. The notes below highlight the way in which the group grappled with the idea of creating a public event that focused on violence. They touch upon some of the concerns group members had about taking a public stand over violence, of being connected to this initiative, and they also shed light upon the work the group did to breathe life into the emergent idea of *community conversations* about violence. They talk about needing to make the event creative and engaging while at the same time not diluting the focus on violence. The multiple tensions between making a safe, creative and energetic event that would generate change momentum, not sanitising the subject and not being so confronting that people could not afford to take the risk of participating and acknowledging the power violence might have had over them, can all be seen in the discussions the group had as they planned this courageous public event. The excerpts below come from the meetings through early 2009 and up until the group became intensely focused on planning the event in June 2009:

*A repeating conversation from the beginning of 2009 has been the need for a ‘coming out’ day. Conversations about breaking out, because in violence people ‘got stuck’. The intention then was that bringing it out into open space would help unstick it. Lots of time was spent exploring different strategies we could use to do this. Suggestions for bringing violence out in the open were varied with the overwhelming sense that the ‘coming out’ needed to be creative and captivating to engage everyone but that it also had to remain on task to talk about violence. There was a tendency in these conversations to water down or disguise violence so it was palatable and not too ‘in the face’. We were intrigued to observe that our own processes reflected a lot of what happens inside families and realised that this was a way that violence attempted to stay behind closed doors even when we were deliberately trying to expose violence. Our conversation then moved to think about the times that violence neutralised*



"You are a person and I'm a person and let's just share our information, let's do this together"

*us by getting us to talk about violence, but not actually do anything about it with the knowledge we gained. Thinking about how we took this learning into the planning of the event, we realised that it was important to grow the strengths in the community at the same time as unveiling violence [VFCP records, 2009].*

*The conversation went round in circles making it hard to break out and go forward; violence is clever.....We needed to stop playing the game and break out by changing our response to the violence. I can take charge of this and change my response. Our process mirrored that of people in the cycle of violence; talking but not having the courage to do! [VFCP project notes, 2/06/09].*

*How do we engage people fully in the community events rather than having them watch from the outside? Using language and calling violence what it is, is important for any event exposing violence. After naming the stuck places, creativity was unleashed. Some also suggested the paradox of being stuck - Being stuck is not necessarily a negative place to be. It can be a time of regrouping and building the energy building to break into a new place -sometimes it is a necessary step on the way to becoming strong enough to say 'enough is enough'. VIOLENCE HAS 1000 NAMES. The hope for the morning was to re-energise the VFCP and also engage a new group of community consultants so that the circle of influence for the initiative would continue to grow [VFCP project notes, 2/06/09].*

The balloons were left after the hui to fall to the ground over time to indicate the slow quiet and largely hidden process that will take place to dissipate violence.

The first community event was approached with a mixture of anticipation and some anxiety – the community consultants and staff involved in organising the event now understood a lot more about how violence operated at both a personal and community level, and they had some very clear ideas about the best ways to draw people safely into the *community conversation* they were hosting. The concerns about risks for individuals and the challenge that speaking publicly about something that thrives in silence remained. But on the day the group were optimistic that their event would generate new ripples of change around the community. The next extract from the VFCP initiative records chronicles the way the first *community conversation* unfolded.

## VIOLENCE EXPOSED: 'VIOLENCE HAS 1000 NAMES' (AUGUST 2009).

*This event is going to bring violence out of the closet. The initial presentation is kept simple and designed to involve all participants as both learners and teachers. 125 Black and 25 gold helium balloons were against the ceiling. A bowl of black jelly beans were on the coffee table in the middle of the room, any one could have thought it was party time. Forty people attended the event. The black balloons represented a cloud that hangs in the air in the same way that violence hovers over a person, family or community. The gold balloons represented nuggets of wisdom and experience that are learned by the victims of violence. The choice of colour for the balloons was questioned, people wondered why red wasn't used, we discussed the metaphor that violence was like a big black cloud. Ribbons hanging from the balloons represented the tentacles of violence and the silent way violence entangles. Writing on the balloons with white markers symbolised spot-lighting and exposing of violence for what it really is and bringing it out of hiding. Looking at the names from below was like seeing violence from a different perspective. The balloons were left after the hui to fall to the ground over time to indicate the slow quiet and largely hidden process that will take place to dissipate violence. Courage also has 1000 names.*

*Participants were supported to share some stories of violence in small groups after participants had placed themselves on a continuum of violence. Two community consultants shared their stories speaking directly to the way that life is in our neighbourhood. One of the community consultants was a visible person in the community and so telling her story was a risk. After telling the story she felt she was looked at sideways by people who knew her well and could not believe her story. Those who had not had any violence in their lives could not believe the stories of those who had and the ones who had experienced violence could not believe that it is possible that people had not had any violence in their lives. We observed that it is hard to see outside of your own experience and when you live with violence everyday it becomes part of what is normal in your world and this makes it very hard to envision how you would live without it.*

*Being creative and encouraging creativity by the staff is going to rub off on the clients who come to Te Aroha Noa. Deliberately enhancing creativity is a way of standing against violence that would want to shut creativity and life down; creativity grows life but violence shuts life down. Creativity may be messy when unleashed, creativity gathers a life of its own. We noted emerging from the event that violence moved from being an individual problem to a community problem. We had thought about what our responses to violence were as a community? And we had thought of the things that starve violence of oxygen [VFCP records, 2009].*

The 'Violence has a Thousand Names' conversation brought 20 new community members into the group, over the ensuing months this settled to a core of 5 or 6 new community members who regularly attended the meetings. There was a sense that this *community conversation* had a cathartic effect on people and those who had been attending the group meetings since the beginning observed that energy levels dropped somewhat in the meetings that occurred in the months after the event.

*We learned that the process of deep listening and intense support along with an attitude of not trying to fix the problem empowered people to make their own changes. Caring deeply but holding lightly the stories empowers change from the inside out rather than outside first, which may be short-lived. This was a chance for people to get together to explore violence without labelling people [Staff interview, 2010].*

As time moved on from the first community event the group began to ask itself if there was a limit to the number of stories that could be shared and reflected upon before people became desensitised or the process became formulaic. Critical reflection

had always been part of the group process and so members began to question the purpose of the group, perhaps it had achieved its goal and come to a natural conclusion in the Violence has a Thousand Names *community conversation*. The project journal makes this comment after the August event:

*Some of the members had come out of violent situations and didn't want to revisit their story; it was in the past and that is where it needed to stay [VFCP records, 2009].*

Through to the end of 2009, conversations continued to explore violence and its many manifestations in people's lives. During this time the nature of the conversations seemed to shift. In terms of the exploration of the many facets of violence, group members took a critical stance to the nature of violence and were prepared to challenge assumptions about family violence on a broad front. For instance in September 2009, project notes identify conversations about family violence as a gendered issue and the need for recognition of violence in all its forms if Highbury were to become truly violence free:

*The focus shifted from men being the only ones who are violent to understanding that women and children can also be violent. Exposing violence in all its forms diminishes its power. It is important to honestly face who is being violent in different situations [VFCP project notes, 9/09/09].*

---

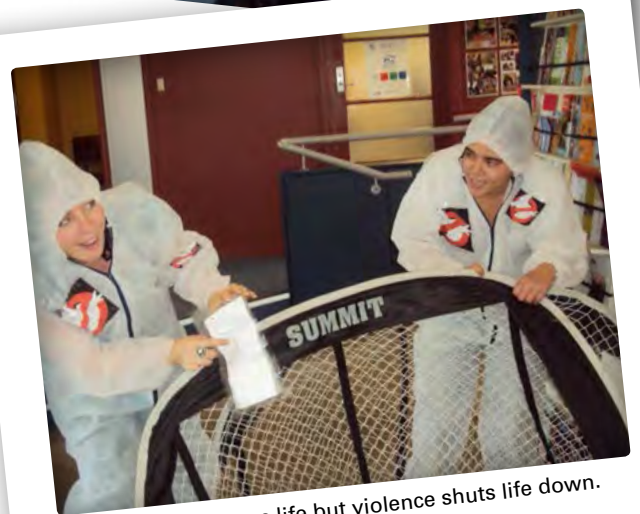
**W**e learned that the process of deep listening and intense support along with an attitude of not trying to fix the problem empowered people to make their own changes. Caring deeply but holding lightly the stories empowers change from the inside out rather than outside first, which may be short-lived.

---

Participants in the initiative also wanted to explore the language and behaviours that supported and concealed violence. For instance, during September 2009 they noted the following discussions:

*What does sorry mean? Playing the game keeps violence hidden, saying sorry is part of the game that lets it start again. But when you change your part everyone else has to change as well. If you don't accept sorry this time maybe a new game has to start because you will not keep playing the old game of pretending. Nobody wins games played through violence. Everybody plays a little part in the big game but nothing changes unless someone is determined to make a change [VFCP project notes, 9/09/09].*





Creativity grows life but violence shuts life down.



*Today the story of being sheltered from violence as a child was told. It wasn't until in a relationship as an adult that violence had entered this woman's life. But then looking backwards she could see the violence that she had been protected from [VFCP project notes, 22/09/09].*

*During October people talked about why they had joined the community consultants project after the 'Violence has 1000 names' hui. Some suggested that sharing stories reduced the sense of isolation they had felt prior to the event. They noted that isolation was a slow process, it crept in without being noticed; 'I was in a trap', 'I was shutting down', 'Taking all the abuse for the children', 'Running away from Rage', 'Violence stalks', 'Victims sacrifice themselves to save others', 'The belief in the ideal family made me stay in violence', 'Violence is reinforced by Christianity – stay in it and make it work', 'Prison reinforces the rules of the game' [VFCP project notes, 10/11/09].*

*This meeting was the beginning of asking questions from the absent partner's point of view. Who is going to support the other half of this story? This was raised in the context of a story in which all the parties in this story were well known, which inevitably focused us all on the reality that there are many different ways in which stories can be told, and for each telling, there are parts of the story that do not get told. One group member observed: 'I suppose it is easier to hear a story about someone you don't know because then you hear the story as a totality', whereas when you know the other people who are involved in the story part of your hearing includes a narrative thread that is you trying to fill in the bits that are not being recounted. This led us to wonder 'How would you feel if you were that person being spoken about?' We reflected on the previous meeting where the teller of the story was talking about someone else rather than self. This caused uneasiness in the group because everyone knew of the person being talked about. This had not occurred in previous conversations when the person in the centre of the story was generally not known by the rest of the group [VFCP project notes, 24/11/09].*

*Did we become scared in the presence of violence that violence could become so very personal? The stories moved from considering violence that had happened in the past to telling about violence that was occurring now. This was shocking to some of us; we had been able to retain an objective external stance when it was historical, when it was current we felt suddenly powerless and unable to ask the deepening questions. The immediacy of violence happening now left us silent again [VFCP project notes, 24/11/09].*

*We returned to the issue raised in September of men who suffer the violence. However trying to keep that conversation going was difficult, it kept reverting back to talking about women being abused, reflecting the membership and experiences of the group. The conversation moved to talking about verbal abuse. Is it OK to retaliate verbally to verbal abuse, why are our standards so incongruent? How do you reduce the power base of an abuser? [VFCP project notes, 8/12/09].*

---

*I was in a trap, I was shutting down, taking all the abuse for the children. Running away from Rage. Violence stalks, victims sacrifice themselves to save others.*

---

Through 2009 the group traversed challenging terrain, exploring the insidious nature of violence, the way that it drew people in and rendered them powerless to resist or remove themselves, the issues of violence by men and the issue of violence against men, which the group struggled to explore and unpack. Violence that was actually occurring in the lives of group members while they were participating in the project was very confronting for group members. They came face to face with the daily lived experience of other group members. While trying to support each other to find safe solutions they worked hard to retain the focus on the kaupapa of the group which was on creating change in the neighbourhood. As 2010 unfolded the group began to seek more clarity about how to create change from the deepening understanding of the dynamics of violence that they had generated. Meeting notes record this shift in focus and it can also be seen in the changing focus of the *community conversations*.

In addition to the deepened exploration of the way that violence manifested itself that occurred following the 'Violence has a Thousand Names' *community conversation*, the group also began again to wonder about whether or not the initiative should continue. The project notes identify that group members maintained a critically reflective stance on the work they were doing, and even when listening to distressing stories, a focus was retained on the ultimate purpose of the project and whether or not the *community conversations* and the community consultant collaborative model were contributing to project goals:

*This next phase of the initiative brought new people who had not had the opportunity to tell their stories in depth. As time passed, we noticed that a couple people told their stories week after week, usually telling the same part of the story. In talking with Bruce [the CEO]*



*we wondered if we were 'listening tired' and hearing the in-depth stories week after week led us to the place of feeling bogged down. We also needed to be careful to make sure that the group wasn't becoming too internally focused – maybe the telling and retelling of the stories was part of healing for those people, and if so we maybe needed to think about other ways of supporting those people to work through these issues. The longer-standing group members wanted to move forward to a different place than the new participants. Did we need to manage the story-telling differently? It was interesting to reflect and wonder if having fresh listeners could have been an alternative. The move to a more therapeutic stance in the group seemed to be a way of moving from the feeling of inaction and being bogged down in the storytelling. We responded to the powerlessness that was evident in the stories and tried to work with the participants, in the group setting, on their story. To the new participants the telling of the story was the most important part of the meeting; it was the space in which they would be heard deeply and respected, possibly for the first time, with such a traumatic story. These stories often included an element of isolation and being part of a group was counter-cultural in the world of violence where shame and therefore isolation plays a powerful role. Did this mean that even though at times it felt like therapy, that the purpose of the group, to effect bigger change, was still being met? [VFCP project records, 2009].*

*The systems in families, community and workplaces came in to view in these conversations and took on a powerful place in the stories. The family or system put on a mask to make believe all was well to the outside people looking in. Was this happening to this group also, when actually we needed to confront our own inability to reflect on what was happening at the time? Where can alternative ways of being come from? Experiencing and living with new ways of being violence free. Living with violence is more comfortable than living with peace if that is what you are used to [VFCP project records, 2010].*

---

**T**he family or system put on a mask to make believe all was well to the outside people looking in.

---

Funding had stopped for the initiative during 2009, one very successful *community conversation* had been executed and the group composed of staff and community consultants had met on a fortnightly basis for two and a half years. The group took time to reflect upon what had occurred and to think

about the future. Again the termination of the initiative was raised; some wondered if meetings were now occurring out of habit, for the sake of having a meeting, rather than to achieve the specific goals set out at the beginning of the initiative. Others wondered if people were more guarded about their stories now, concern was raised here that the initiative was now well known around the neighbourhood and that safety issues might be impacting upon the comfort of people in sharing their experiences openly. Questions were asked about the needs and expectations of members of the group and whether these were best met by the group in its current format or by some other process.

Despite the uncertainty in the group about the impact of the initiative and concern about meeting for the sake of meeting, the group came to the conclusion that the work was not finished. Reflecting back on this time in the group, a participant observed that this was a time of challenge for the group because it brought confusion and a sense of chaos. This was an uncomfortable time and the temptation was to give in to this discomfort and agree to finish the initiative. However, the willingness of members to work through this uncomfortable process meant they could emerge in a stronger place able to contemplate bigger challenges in their engagement in *community conversations*. Group members felt that this was a critical point in the overall development of the initiative which facilitated the latter larger ripple effects from the VFCP (see later: Tracing the ripples from the VFCP). Group members decided that there was a risk that violence would slip from people's minds if they stopped meeting and that there was a need to focus intentionally on training influencers in the community. The project records document some of the comments group members made while exploring the options of continuing or ending the group:

*(We are) challenging the beliefs and systems of the community, we can stop brushing it under the carpet by creating an environment of safety and security in which to tell the stories of violence (in the VFCP).*

*The people who attended the group supported the emerging new stories of changing the culture of violence.*

*This time in the life of the group was an example of learning how to live through the phase of confusion and chaos so that new possibilities and order will emerge. This is a distinctly unpleasant stage but utterly necessary in the transformation journey [VFCP project records, 2009].*





These reflective conversations acknowledged the work that had been done and the energy and time required to create meaningful processes. This reflection also reminded participants of the focus on community and wider change processes. Mancini et al. (2006, p. 209) note that effective community based violence prevention initiatives activate a sense of identity and belonging to the locality and others have also observed that such interventions can stimulate social and relational networks among residents which increases the sense of belonging and from there to heightened willingness to take positive action around family violence (Sabol et al., 2004; Bowen et al., 2000 p.11). The work of the VFCP appeared to have become part of the social fabric in this part of Highbury and in its own way contributed to the sense of belonging of community members.

In reflecting on whether or not the VFCP should continue, the group was clear that the external focus upon stimulating change in the neighbourhood needed to be retained as this was the central core of the initiative. The group decided on a new *community conversation* that would highlight the way in which violence survived and which was connected to the everyday and the ordinary. The Web of Violence conversation took place over two sessions in late July and early August 2010. Initially only one conversation was planned, however participants asked for a second session that could explicitly focus upon how to move from understanding violence to building strategies for change. Participants report this as a very strong extended conversation across two events that many people found challenging.

## THE WEB OF VIOLENCE

*We started talking about the next community event. The feeling was that it needed to have a playful character so that people would not feel overwhelmed. This is also important in terms of creating spaces for people to get in touch with their inner child – fun and playfulness provides strategies that help people to overcome violence. Date set for 29 July 2010, with the theme of Web Busting; create a web with objects hanging from it and words of violence. The point of this exercise is to get people thinking more deeply about specific situations. Violence is always a possibility; it is like being caught in a web where we pretend everything is fine and no-one will speak out. If violence is not dealt with it brings greater shame than if violence had been dealt with openly [VFCP project notes, 28/04/10].*

As noted above, the planning for the Web Busting Hui began as a response to a sense that the initiative was coming to a natural end. Fewer people were coming to tell and reflect on their stories as 2010 moved on. Again, the high risk strategy of talking about the violence that was present in the neighbourhood was the route identified by community consultants as the preferred method for moving forward. The beginning of the process was drawn out. Although there was energy for the project, members seemed to get stuck with coming up with a name that would give a theme or focus for the morning. Finally the theme that seemed to encapsulate the preceding conversations was that violence was like a web into which people were caught and pulled. The following extended excerpt from the research fieldnotes provides an overview of the *community conversation*:

## CONVERSATION PART 1: 'WEB BUSTING' (29 JULY 2010)

*Given what had felt like flagging energy for the project earlier in the year, the group was surprised when 27 people assembled for the Violence Free Web Busting morning on the 29<sup>th</sup> of July. Along with the Web Busters team, the Ghost Busters theme music and a web created on the ceiling of the Gathering Space the scene was set for the morning's korero. The Web on the ceiling was littered with debris such as money, chocolates, flowers, beer bottle, children's toys, spiders, jewelry - sweeteners that are used in violence as well as weapons, toy syringe, chains, and some of the 1000 names of violence from the preceding event. In the introductions it was evident that most of the participants had witnessed family violence. The facilitators used creativity to present violence in a non-threatening manner to engage all people who were present. This topic was likely to disturb or raise powerful memories and emotions that have been buried or coped with for many years. Conversations crossed many areas of life where violence had been present and the participants saw value in raising the profile of violence through conversation and creativity.*

*From the outset participants actively engaged in the hui. Introductions turned to the beginning phase of story-telling as the participants were asked to say why they had come to the morning when violence was the topic. The connection people had with violence was a powerful thread uniting the introductions.*

*Brad, dressed as 'violence', crept into the room to the Ghostbusters music and started hanging spider webbing around different people. Meanwhile, Donna, the Web Buster,*

peered around the corner looking for 'violence'. Carrying the vacuum on her back, Donna went looking for 'violence'. Eventually when Donna caught up with Brad the Web was vacuumed and a 'BUSTED' sign was placed on his back. Humour in the seriousness of the topic allowed people to let their barriers down so that individuals could connect with the topic of violence as both an observer of violence and as someone who had directly experienced it. The familiar music, again associated with humour, connected with memories and places that were familiar but hidden in the depths of memory. The purpose of the creativity was to connect people with their own memories and to take them on a journey of reflective-ness while bringing violence out of silence and isolation into the open forum.

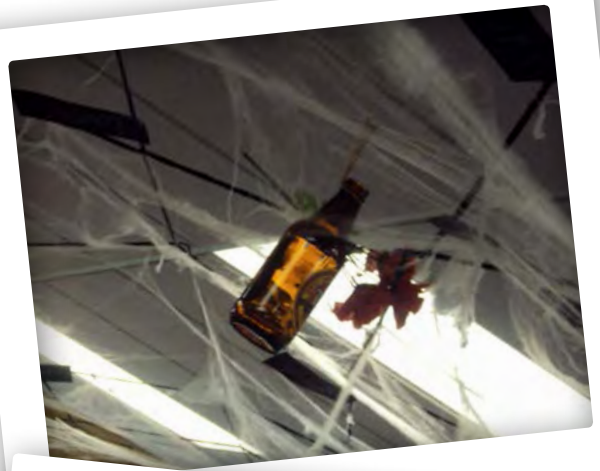
The question was asked, what do you notice in the web? We were amazed that immediately one man pointed out that there were things in the web that were seen as good things such as the chocolate and flowers but they can also be used for control and as part of the cycle of violence. Awakening the senses with various containers for three blindfolded people sent jelly flying over the carpet as the volunteers smelt, felt and tasted the mystery food. Although memories weren't the subject of the exercise all the foods connected people with memories that may be pleasant or unpleasant; in connecting with memories reflection can begin. This exercise was used as a connector to drawing violence.

One staff member told us her story of violence breaking into her world. She walks on egg shells in her own home where there is a fear of intimidation. Violence happens behind closed doors. She comes to work to be away from the violence she experiences at home.

The participants reflected on words in her story;

- Behind closed doors
- Blaming self
- Threats
- Guilt
- Escaping to work, sanctuary
- Taking the rap for something the father has done.
- Walking on egg shells
- Trying to find solutions

Paper, pens and crayons were distributed among the group who were requested to draw violence. Using colour, objects or animals this was an exercise to connect people to their thinking about violence. Some people drew objects, others patterns with different colours and then used these as a basis for discussion about what has drawn them into the web. People opened



The web was littered with debris such as money, chocolates, flowers etc. sweeteners that are used in violence as well as weapons.

up and told their stories of violence in real life. Small group discussions allowed people to talk about their own reaction to violence in their community and immediate neighborhood.

Just before morning tea the Good Samaritan Rap, a YouTube clip, was shown. Brad asked the question to reflect on while watching the YouTube clip, "Who were you in the story?"

- Be involved
- Take responsibility
- Violence is something people can walk past
- Keep on trying, keep involved
- Nobody gets involved until one person gets involved
- Strength can come when we share our lives with one another.

A story was told about a volunteer in the middle of a circle. As the story unfolded instances of violence were identified and with each one a blanket was put over the volunteer. More and more blankets were placed over her and she was weighted down, getting hot under the weight. What did it feel like to be under all those blankets? Dark, alone, isolated, weighted down; you can't move under the blankets. As good things started to happen in the story the blankets started coming off again. How did she feel now? She felt free; she could move and see light. When the process was over there were still blankets left as a residue and scars of violence that she might continue to be unaware of.

The discussion about what draws people into the web followed. Discussion was insightful with many people reflecting deeply about their experience of violence.

- Working/money/time is an excuse for violence
- False hope is your enemy; holding onto the crumbs of affection, you look for emotional development in this person, you read into every little word and action that things are getting better, but actually they are getting worse
- Violence supports the lifestyle you think you want. Violence makes your life work
- Generational cycle, learn how you are in relationships
- Abuse versus discipline
- Find yourself asking permission to do things – control
- Grooming process – empty promises, bringing in subtlety, magnetised to people who give or show you affection
- Things said in jest have an impact
- Acceptance of violence by your peer group

- If you come forward you are made to look like a loser. There is shame around speaking out, you are made to feel like a fool
- You don't want to be rejected so you stay with that one person, because they have told you no one will have you
- Depression in relationships
- The statement was made that in intimate relationships women could also be violent.

The conversation provided several opportunities for sharing information and telling of stories, participants became very engaged in the process and bringing small groups or pair-working to a close was often difficult. People were engaged in telling their stories and having the opportunity to talk about violence.

From this discussion we created a continuum that extended from the spider (Violence) to the window of hope in the Gathering Space. People were given the opportunity to reflect on where they were and on the fact that movement continues so that there are times when violence is more infused in life than others. The web of violence does not let people break free very easily.

Standing on the continuum was celebrating the movement of some people from violence towards non-violence. A mother talked about being intentional about having no violence in her daughter's life. The rules and boundaries that she has for her daughter were to protect her from the violence that her mother has experienced so she will respect and make good decisions for herself.

A man was standing near violence because that represented the way he supported and stuck up for female friends. When any guys hurt his female friends he steps in and let the police know so that justice would be served and that it is not ok. Violence is close to him by his choice to work against violence and to say it is not OK.

One woman was near the violence end of the continuum because the violence she had experienced was windows being broken and her house invaded. The offenders took food and even the toilet rolls.

The morning then moved on to a new activity - the tug of war. Humour and laughter was present as this activity began and many people were ready to volunteer. Brad was at one end and a couple of women were at the other end. The teams were unbalanced with the violence end being the stronger of the two teams at the beginning. More people joined in as the teams started pulling. At the beginning no mention was made of which was the violence end. This is the response of the onlookers:



- *There was a bigger group at one end and naturally other people jumped into help, like the Good Samaritan*
- *I jumped in because I saw that the team was losing*
- *The violence group had more numbers, when the support was needed against violence other people joined in. You are stronger when other people join in than when you are on your own*
- *You need to speak out otherwise people will not know*
- *Was it scary thinking if I jump in I'm going to be dragged under with the other lot? There was no thought to self preservation my joining the team was about helping them come out on top*
- *If we all join together we can beat violence no matter how big it is*

---

**W**as it scary thinking if I jump in I'm going to be dragged under with the other lot! There was no thought to self preservation my joining the team was about helping them come out on top. If we all join together we can beat violence no matter how big it is.

---

*Violence doesn't want to come out in the open, when it is behind closed doors it has got a winning streak. When it comes out and people start joining together we can be stronger than violence.*

*Dion spoke of his past and the violence that was in the periphery of his life. Being brought up in a violence-free home didn't give him strategies to deal with anger or when he was upset. When Dion was angry he was also violent, 'I was throwing kid tantrums in a man's body. I never had people show me ways of dealing with my anger and didn't have the ability to ask for help'. Dion's violent ways rubbed off on his partner and they flared up in her also. They have worked out strategies to understand each other. If a relationship is conflict-free it could mean that one of the partners holds all the power. Physical violence, emotional violence, manipulation, and put downs were ways of dealing with emotion Dion did not know how to express himself. Dion's partner was strong enough and willing enough to challenge the violence.*

*Participants' response to the morning:*

- *Enlightening*
- *Positive*

- *Engaging*
- *Reflection*
- *Courage*
- *Support*
- *Not alone*
- *Triggered memories – good and tough*
- *Overwhelming*
- *Complicated*
- *Shaky/disturbed*

*[Research fieldnotes, 2010].*

The VFCP researcher made the following observation in her fieldnotes following this event:

*As I reviewed the reflections (above) I was moved by the amount of knowledge that these men and women had and up until now for many of them the knowledge and understanding had been hidden by violence itself. The very process of having people talk about violence in the community conversations brought a change in thinking because in this environment people were not going to be judged or shamed for what they contributed. Having a safe environment where trusting relationships had been formed provided the backdrop for openness if participants chose to tell their story. At the end of the community conversation participants noted a sense of being involved in building hope and a strong conviction that they could do this if they stayed together; it needed support and collective effort. They understood that in order to be influencers of others they had to start with themselves. At the end of this community conversation they were left with the question – how to begin, how to move from understanding to action [Research fieldnotes, 2010].*

A second event was therefore identified as needed in order to build upon this new understanding and to try to take the learning and apply it so that people were more able to stop violence within their own lives and the lives of those around them. This was planned for the following week. These different threads are identified in the extracts that follow:

*We asked ourselves: what are the sorts of conversations that can be life-giving, that people reported as encouraging growth and also as providing energy for the group to continue its work. Some of our stories started to cover less traumatic types of abuse which brought us to a place of seeing that abuse was present in places that looked very respectable from the outside. What can build the strength in the person to overcome violence? People had noticed that support from outside to make decisions that bring life to the family were very important in creating conditions where change became possible.*

*The further we moved into the conversations the more difficult it became to find words to describe what was being discovered. The use of the words perpetrator and victim was intentionally avoided in order to discover knowledge about violence without blame. In reflection this also allowed us to see that in the relationship where violence is present both parties can be in a place of power and powerlessness at different times.*

---

**T**he use of the words perpetrator and victim was intentionally avoided in order to discover knowledge about violence without blame.

---

*One participant in this second group of consultants felt that hearing the traumatic stories was one thing she didn't want to add into her life because the stories were beyond belief, even though she understood they were happening to her friends, or were in the history of her friends. She decided to stop participating in these conversations because she felt she had nothing from her history to contribute.*

*Violence was still present in the stories of the participants attending the meetings. Violence was as fresh as the immediately preceding holidays. It became evident that in some of the stories conversations around violence isolated the story teller so that they appeared to not have a role in the dance of violence, as though they were separate from rather than being an integral part of whole. This created a stalemate in the process because if they are not part of the whole then they are powerless to do anything to change it. Even deciding to do something different is taking an active part in the process and can move violence in a different direction. We need to understand how reflection can be taught so that people can see that even as a victim they have a role and they can therefore take action to influence how things end up [VFCP project records, 2010].*

## CONVERSATION PART 2: 'BREAKING FREE' (5 AUGUST 2010)

*Donna introduced the morning and outlined ground rules that had been established in previous community conversations. This included being respectful, supporting each other, keeping confidentiality in terms of not talking about what occurred in the event outside of the event, and listening rather than talking over*

*each other when we have something to say. She started by getting everyone to introduce themselves and tell us what their favorite childhood toy was. An Ice Breaker activity followed that involved people holding hands in a circle and trying to get each other to crash into a bucket in the centre of the room. The interesting thing about this ice breaker was that it brought out the survivor and the aggressor in different people. The competitive people were the ones really trying to get people out in the game and others were the ones who stayed well away from the bucket. All round the grip of people was extremely strong and in some cases painful. Working together only a few people got out as part of the game. The aggressors were the ones that got out in the end.*

*Recap from the previous week:*

- *Drew what we thought violence looked like*
- *Small groups and discussed; how we get caught in the web*
- *Just put up with things when you are caught in the web*
- *If you break the habit what is going to happen next*
- *You are more scared of what you don't know than the violence which is familiar*
- *If you want change you need to do it yourself*
- *Tug of War and beat violence in the end by working together*
- *How do we support each other so we can break the power of violence?*
- *Need people outside the web to talk to and remind you that violence is not ok*
- *Need to value the people who speak out*
- *Violence comes in many forms and some are very subtle*
- *Violence can sneak into our lives*
- *Bullying and teasing is violence which has longterm consequences*
- *Is there stuff happening around you that you choose not to get involved in*
- *Be a Good Samaritan*
- *Offer to take children off friend's hands if they are not coping*

*Talking about it as if it were a person helped us to expose violence and bring it out of hiding. We were not seeking to apportion blame; our focus was on finding ways to say it was not ok in our community, whānau, our life. Each of us was able to be a violence free ambassador who could influence our community, the focus of the community conversation was to identify what each of us needed to do to change.*

*We looked at the strengths that we had rather than issues. We were hoping to feel empowered. Who are you as you sit around this room? We are going to help each other discover our strengths. What do you need to stand against violence?*

- *Courage*
- *Balls*
- *Voice*
- *Good supports*
- *Forgiveness*
- *Good friends*
- *Comfort Food – with friends to build support, health and strength for yourself*
- *Community*
- *Focus on the future/dream/vision – goals, dreams, being a good mum, being a better parent*
- *Need to be respected and pay attention to what words come out of your mouth. Respect for self comes out in your words and then you value others. – ‘Respect for myself grew when I realised I had to respect myself before anyone else would respect me. The way I respected myself was reflected in the way I treated others. If I can’t love the way I am, how am I going to love someone else? If you are a mess you can’t really fix anything.’ [Community member, 2010].*

---

**R**espect for myself grew when I realised I had to respect myself before anyone else would respect me. The way I respected myself was reflected in the way I treated others. If I can’t love the way I am, how am I going to love someone else? If you are a mess you can’t really fix anything.

---

*What would help you see what resources you already have inside as individuals and as community connected in supporting each other? ‘In treating others with respect, it comes back in other ways, in paying it forward I am happy with myself. The more you do for others the more comes back to you - 10 fold’ [Community member]. Finding an inner peace you know that those who want to be around you as this person will stay with you and those who do not will go. Sometimes you’ve got to love yourself because nobody else will love you the way you want.*

*I wonder if you’ve noticed anything different about your life since we started talking about violence last week. Has there been an OMG [oh*

*my god] moment?*

- *A mother talked of the change she has made in her family over the past week as she has attempted to be positive in her interaction with her daughter including allowing her to dress in uncoordinated fashion because of the clothes she had chosen. Since the change in how the mother talks to her daughter she has noticed a change in her daughter’s behaviour. She is modelling to her entire extended family.*
- *Being stronger about saying no to things.*
- *The violence on television is contributing to violence in the community because it has been normalised. One of the men has become aware of how violence surrounds us.*
- *Instead of reacting, a woman has been using a process which is stopping, looking, and listening to what is going on before responding. Stay in motion not emotion.*
- *Another woman heard people talking about their children and bullying.*
- *A parent was bullied as a child and so she is building her daughter’s self esteem so that when she goes to school she will be able to stand up for herself.*

*Brad and Donna along with Anna and Ripeka entered to the music of Ghost Busters to dramatise the spreading web of violence. This time Donna was Violence and the others were the Web Busters. This was to emphasise that women sometimes have a part in perpetuating violence and being violent. Working as a team violence can be caught. Working as a community and doing our little bit will overcome violence.*

*Dion told his story with partner Shelly also talking from her perspective. He had sought to take control of the relationship constantly physically, mentally and any other possible way he could. Dion’s change began as he began to understand his culture and the place he had in the past, present, future and his obligations to the wider world. Who am I and who do I stand for? Walking flesh and blood of his ancestors and his role is to ensure his family continues the path of his ancestors as guardians of this place, culture and people. As a couple they are comfortable with pulling each other up when things are not going well. They openly converse about the problems and then the children see how the issues are resolved. As arguments are resolved on the spot instead of being carried on for a long period of time the arguments are getting smaller and smaller. One of things that helped change Dion was finding a passion within him and liking who he was. Those who see people inflicting the violence don’t realise they are also a victim and Dion*



needed to face the hurts he was carrying. Facing up to his obligations and seeing that life was no longer about himself was important. Shelly was controlling about money because it was the only thing in her relationship with Dion that she could control. Hitting rock bottom and depression when the relationship broke up for four months became the catalyst for change. Shelly became the change she wanted to see. Shelly modeled what she wanted to see which took some of the power out of the violence and the family. Shelly had a belief in herself and a trust and belief in Dion. Communication was one of the biggest things that Shelly and Dion have worked on since Dion allowed Shelly to have access to intimacy. Shelly had to learn to take a risk for intimacy and living what you want. Dion let the pain of the 10 year-old boy out, felt the pain and then knew that the pain was no longer the master and Dion no longer a servant to the fear. Dion tried to sabotage relationships so that he would never feel the pain of the 10 year-old boy again. If the relationship broke up it would be because of Dion's actions not him as a person. This is the first time Shelly has talked about this, her parents don't even know about this stuff. Violence affects us all and stops us being all that we could possibly be. Shelly came from a 2 parent family and her father called her a princess, and Dion used to say 'just because you came from a princess family' and she used to ask herself why is she sitting there doing this, while she was sitting crying after being dragged down the hallway. Dion used to reflect that it was my fault and Shelly started to think it was me. The fear of the unknown kept Shelly in the place of thinking that she needed Dion, and not take the next step out.

What are you connecting with from this story?

- Moana could see what they were talking about and she was on the same journey as Dion and Shelly. Moana and partner have learnt from each other how to relate. Looking at family background was needed to build the bridges. Change began when the walls started coming down when a big move happened, when there was no family, friends to rely on and they had to do it themselves and learned to get on.
- Ainsley connected with the conversation about walls. The walls look like they have crumbled. Being scared of the hurt you might feel if they reject you. Communication wasn't happening and Ainsley was bottling everything up. Our rough time is over and now she and partner are working towards where Moana and her partner are. She is encouraged by what she heard in Dion's story. Separation forced Ainsley and partner to look at themselves, it was like a slap in the face.

- Gina's partner lives in Auckland and she has had to learn to live without him after being dependant on him for everything. Gina loves him more and appreciates her partner more now they are not living together but are together. Our kids never saw the violence but they knew there was something that was not right, they saw there was no love anymore. Gina had to be stronger for the children. I didn't know myself as well as I do now.

People are making choices to find strength, to make a significant journey within themselves. Healthiness is evident in the choices that these people are making. Anger is a state of mind and what is needed is self control to navigate through it.

Anna spoke of the feeling that everyone expected her to be happy all the time and she tried really hard to be happy in front of people. She spoke of sabotaging all her relationships so that she would never be the one that was hurt. Anna followed her mother's footsteps. Part of her learning has to know that love doesn't come from someone else first, it comes from self. Being single has given her a much more enjoyable life but she still has all the conflicts that couples have, within herself. Anna can't be herself with her mum. This is all she has. 'I didn't think that it was an issue still for me. I don't want to be rejected; even when I am completely in love with a person I will ruin it because I don't want them to reject me. I love singing, I sing all the time but I won't get on stage to sing because I don't want people to reject my voice, that is what I am comfortable with, that is my serenity and I don't want people to take that from me. That is why I don't have visitors, I don't visit people, and why I don't text back.'

Letting down the shields is part of the process of growing greater intimacy with each other. The porcupine look, the prickliness protects. Anna said that is why she appears so happy, so people won't ask how she is and then she won't have to lie. Moana agreed and said she has trained herself to know how much to tell and when and to whom and still be able to say everything is well. Things could be screaming and crumbling around her but she has learned how to keep the pretend self up. Anna said it has helped to have been to drama school. However Bruce pointed out how we all long to be known for who we really are. You can end up feeling worse because you are pretending to be ok. 'Am I that bad a person that I have to pretend my life is ok?'

---

One of the great ways of defeating violence is becoming real.

---

One of the great ways of defeating violence is becoming real. The bit that we know might be real in us is the bit that we hide because if that is rejected the whole of us is rejected. How do I want to be supported and how do I want to be a friend? A friend could add to the mess or could be asking very searching questions [Research fieldnotes, 2010].

## THE FINAL CONVERSATION

Growing from the two Web Busting conversations was a sense of responsibility to not stop the story telling, to act on the learning gained and to continue to use the *community conversation* process because it seemed to be creating a safe and trusting environment where people could build the courage to take action within their own neighbourhoods and amongst their own families. There is a growing sense in the literature that in order to address family violence it is necessary to increase the capacity of the natural networks within neighbourhoods to work effectively together and that this has to be done by first building trusting relationships within those networks (Mancini et al., 2006; Sabol et al., 2006). The enhancing of social bonds that exist within neighbourhoods is important in this regard and the VFCP by explicitly and publicly focusing on violence present within the community targeted this area of the social life of the neighbourhood. What this meant for the project was that when community members identified the need for a conversation, it was important that the organisation was in a position to respond and did not retreat because funding had run out or because there were other pressures inside the organisation that demanded attention. A new *community conversation* seemed to be needed. The fluidity between the VFCP and other activities of Te Aroha Noa first observed in 2009 continued in the planning for this conversation. For example, the young parents' support group, an initiative developed by Te Aroha Noa to support young women locally who have become parents, became involved in planning the final *community conversation*. The VFCP initiative records highlight the central role of the community consultants in the planning and execution of all the events and also the way in which the VFCP was shaping activities within Te Aroha Noa:

*Community consultants were involved in planning the community conversations right from the beginning stages where decisions were made about the title or theme for each conversation. This reinforced their centrality in the project and provided an opportunity for them to reflect upon what stopping violence*



*looked like to them and the metaphor that could be used most successfully to communicate this to others. In the series of Web Busting events that took place during July, August and September 2010, other parts of Te Aroha Noa also got involved. For instance the young women from the young parents group took an active role in the final community conversation and subsequent young mothers' groups took the learning from these conversations into the ongoing discussions they had about how to create a healthy, violence-free home [Research fieldnotes, 2010].*

The final event was the largest of all the *community conversations*, and the energy around the event seemed to suggest that despite the sense within the group that work was coming to a natural close, the neighbourhood and the wider staff and client group of Te Aroha Noa were becoming increasingly interested in and receptive to the format of open conversations about violence. As was the case with past *community conversations*, the format of this event was the public sharing of personal experience and so the pattern of bringing out into the open the violence that had survived through silence was maintained. Operation Violence was chosen as the theme for this conversation. This play on words highlighted two dimensions of the discussions – the idea that violence needed to be removed, much like a surgical operation removing something that was causing harm within the body and, related to this, that convalescence or healing is required after an operation. This latter dimension built on the action focus of the preceding conversation and highlighted the importance of healing in the journey out of violence. Healing involved both caring for the people involved and active change. The extended extract below provides a flavour for this conversation:

## OPERATION VIOLENCE 9<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2010

*The morning started with karakia and went straight into a shadow drama with Brad, Donna and Ripeka performing Operation Violence. Behind the sheet Ripeka was operated on with various props being removed from her. With Ripeka coming out of the operation with a bandage around her head a statement was made that there is still healing to occur which takes time and convalescence. Drawing parallels with real surgery, we reflected that the most important thing after an operation is getting people moving. The importance of gently getting people out of bed to walk two or three steps and sit in a chair is not to be underestimated even when pain is present. Moving makes the pain worse initially but it is the moving that quickens recuperation, increases blood supply to damaged parts of the body and reduces the chances of complications.*

*Glenda told her story from a deep and reflective stance in which she moved into speaking about her recovery and subsequent growth in the years following. One response given was to acknowledge that Glenda was human. Many of the young mums in her group had not heard her story prior to the morning. Included in Glenda's story was the importance of God not only in her moving out of an abusive relationship but early on the religious views she had, kept her in the abusive situation. A young boy was present during this story telling. As Glenda told her story she was aware of the need to discern and choose her words carefully. Being mindful of children in the room during Glenda's talk allowed her the opportunity to model caring for children during difficult times.*

*Consequent discussion was based around the connections people made with Glenda's story. To finish off the morning in the context of web busting we worked to unravel the hands. We all stood in one large group and took hold of two different hands on the other side of the group. The goal of the activity was to unravel the large 'tangled mess' and have everyone in one or more circles at the end of the activity. At the beginning of the activity there was not a lot of hope that it was possible to untangle. The arm movements started off one by one and initially the tangled mess became tighter and hope was fading. However by intentionally choosing which movements to make and at times getting through very small tight spaces the tangle seemed to loosen. From a place of hopelessness to total success required patience, watching (reflection), waiting and response. Everyone was amazed and energised by the result! [VFCP project records, 2010].*

## REFLECTIONS ON ALL THE HUI

Detailed records were kept throughout the three years of the project as part of the management of the initiative and also as part of the data set for this research project. From these notes a series of reflections on all four *community conversations* can be reconstructed, and these appear below:

The hui were all organised from a strengths perspective and in the conversations the focus was making positive moves away from violence. During planning of the hui Te Aroha Noa staff were aware of the need to help all participants become aware of their own personal strengths that had developed in difficult times [Staff interview, 2011].

*The hui drew on many skills in creativity, drama, organisation and presentation. Each hui provided an opportunity for different combinations of strengths of many people in the team to come forward. We worked hard throughout to model positive relationship building and team work strategies in the planning and delivery of the community conversations [Staff interview, 2011].*

## REFLECTIONS RE CONVERSATIONS AFTER VIOLENCE HAS 1000 NAMES

Some meetings experimented with psychodrama as a method for facilitating more active and involved sharing of the story-telling than provided by the narrative approach. This brought some new thinking into the project, but the question about purpose remained. We needed to be careful to ensure that we did not descend into therapy and kept our focus instead on initiating change in the neighbourhood. The first time this was used as a technique the story-teller chose who would take the part of the different family members. Each of the actors made significant connections with the parts they were playing. The creativity of the psychodrama breathed life into the group and into the situation. When, during the psychodrama, we broke into hysterical laughter life was injected back into the group. Life was injected when violence was exposed, creatively portrayed, and people were empowered when dramatising the power present in the relationships. The psychodrama connected everyone deeply and had a powerful impact on each person. Everyone became emotionally engaged in this psychodrama but was the person who told the original story getting it? Honesty about the sense of powerlessness became the powerful piece in this process. This piece of work then became an opportunity to coach one of the consultants in her relationship with her daughter. This coaching was like swimming against the current of the river requiring energy and mindfulness in the situation rather than being reactive. This became a



conversation about anger being the root of violence which pushes away when the actual response that is desired is connection.

---

Participating in the hui created opportunities for people to explore the future with a different lens, looking at violence as part of the past and as an experience which can inform how the future might unfold, but not determine it. Participants began to see their strengths and imagine a positive future that is violence free.

---

There is mystery surrounding psychodrama in the way people connect with the story and with each other. Does the process enter to the depths of our being, to places that are locked away, bringing them right in front of us so that we then have a choice to visit those places or lock them away again?

Many stories were told during the hui which when partnered to creativity and fun opened up the opportunity for people to see life in a vibrant way and to begin to think of ways of transforming their lives so that they were free of violence. The background narrative of violence could be seen as dictating or controlling future possibilities. However participating in the hui created opportunities for people to explore the future with a different lens, looking at violence as part of the past and as an experience which can inform how the future might unfold, but not determine it. Participants began to see their strengths and imagine a positive future that is violence free.

Discussions with participants since the hui indicate that people are reflecting on their own involvement in violence and starting to think about different futures for themselves and their children. Normalising conversation about violence has given people permission to share their stories. The experience of small group sessions provided an experience of being able to quietly tell your experience to others within a context that was safe. People did feel safer in smaller groups and we have begun to notice that violence-free conversations are starting to occur in the parenting groups run through the SKIP programme<sup>6</sup>. People want to move towards violence-free living in homes that are safe, loving and creative. Parents are providing ideas for further group work and learning to have loving and safe families.

The list below summarises some of the feedback and reflections of participants from across the whole initiative:

- *The display of the web in the Gathering Space has been important for publicity and readiness of people to talk about violence. Many conversations have been sparked with different groups of people beginning the process of talking about violence more widely and openly.*
- *Using creativity and multimedia in the programme has connected with people no matter where they were on the journey to being violence free. People can be engaged in the process on any level without being forced to a particular place. There may be people sitting on the edge and skimming the surface while some are ready to dive to the depths and others are somewhere along this continuum.*
- *There is a sense of ownership from people who have been involved in the VFCEP and who have had input into organising the hui.*
- *There is usefulness in a process that we've stumbled upon initially because in the first web busting session we didn't get through all that was planned and so had to come back the next week to build on this conversation. This programme could quite easily run through the rest of this term with a gap of a few weeks in between the hui, inviting people to process, reflect and do some of their own work with what they are learning rather than coming week after week for the next installment. This is giving them responsibility for what they are going to do with this knowledge and their life.*
- *Honesty and realness was evident in stories. How many people were being touched but didn't share, speak and tell their stories? It is allowable for people to keep a lid on their stories using this model of working.*
- *People are choosing to come to this hui, they are not ordered. They can choose how much or little they engage, they can come and go, but we trust that each person is still processing things over time. The invitation is given by creating the space and the qualities of the space; there is a self responsibility with the space.*
- *Are we modelling coming out of violence by having a group like this? People still need to make choices about what they do, they need to be empowered to make changes to how they think about and respond to life situations. Coming to this group is voluntary; there are no orders or control in place.*

---

<sup>6</sup> SKIP is a funding stream from the Ministry of Social Development called Supporting Kids Information for Parents. At Te Aroha Noa this initiative takes the form of community events and activities that raise awareness of positive parenting practices and strategies.

- *The understanding of responsibility will have rippling effects on so many areas of their lives. They will have agency in their lives and not just over violence.*
- *This works because a group held the flame. The VFCP was coming to an end and yet it hadn't achieved the aim of changing the attitudes of the community, but it seemed to be waning in energy. Is this a parallel process of meeting in isolation behind closed doors, talking about violence so no one heard what was happening and it was all confidential, getting to the point when we were ready to say enough is enough? The invitation was for other groups to be involved building support to go out discovering the process as it happens.*
- *How much does TV advertising change behaviour? Are people more aware of violence and at the same time does it make violence more cunning and more isolating?*
- *When a whole community is engaged in supporting each other along the way, no matter where you are on the violence free journey, there is encouragement to continue moving forward. There appeared to be no shame in saying where you are on the journey. The model allows anyone to become an influencer. In supporting the influencers they may influence far more than they could ever dream.*
- *Creativity is great violence destroyer. This process needs to be built on relationships.*
- *There are people who want to be part of the process who can't be there because they had a commitment to the children. The process is gaining energy. [Analysis of VFCP records, 2010].*

The VFCP had its origins in the philosophical view that attempts to address family violence in a way that moves out of the private, therapeutic sphere. Rather than doing this by developing social marketing or health promotion initiatives the VFCP sought to engage people who were currently affected by violence in *community conversations* aimed at building understanding and developing strategies for change that would work in the local neighbourhood. This was a new initiative and participants did not know in advance what would work; it was exploratory and so the sense that the project might run its own course and come to a natural end was always part of the consciousness of the group.

The last formal public conversation took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2010. Reflections at the end of this conversation identified that the events had now spoken for themselves and rather than taking

the conversation back into the smaller groups of community consultants, energy needed to be directed at spreading the non-violence message through the routine activities within Te Aroha Noa (for example, in the early childhood centre and in the education and social programmes provided by the agency) and within the neighbourhood through the pre-existing social networks there. There was a concern that if the conversation continued to loop back into the VFCP community consultant group that the process might become self-perpetuating rather than change-initiating for the wider community. There was also interest in taking time to identify the ripples from the three years of *community conversations*. This required that staff invest energy in taking the learning from the conversations into their daily practice and into the development of other community initiatives.

## UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE

The decade-long research journey that Te Aroha Noa has embarked upon with the colleagues in the social work programme at Massey University has led to new understandings about the dynamics of change; how to potentiate it and how it emerges within families and neighbourhoods. As noted earlier, complexity theory has provided an important conceptual framework within which this growing understanding has been situated and it has been used already to document change at both an individual family or whānau level (Munford et al., 2006, 2010; Sanders & Munford, 2010) and also within neighbourhoods (Handley et al., 2009). Complexity theory alerts us to the possibility that when thinking about change small inputs can produce large effects and that these effects may well occur at a later stage or at a distance from the initial input. Sometimes change doesn't occur in the places where we expect it and it does not always occur in the way that we had anticipated. The early impact or change from an initiative is called a proximal effect. Distal effects are the impacts that happen at some distance in terms of time or place from the intervention. Complexity theory also highlights the importance of momentum or energy for change. This is similar to Mancini and colleagues' work (Mancini et al., 2006) on the value of community-based family violence prevention initiatives because they generate energy and increase the density of social interactions within neighbourhoods thereby increasing the potential volume of change that can be achieved. According to complexity theory, change is very hard to achieve in static systems and so the dynamic nature of families and neighbourhoods is an asset rather than a problem when trying to create change. Complexity theory suggests that assessing the effects of our initiatives is going to be a challenge and will require that we are able to allow time for effects to become

apparent. It also requires that we are able to look in distant places for these changes – they may not be where we are expecting them to be.

---

**C**omplexity theory alerts us to the possibility that when thinking about change small inputs can produce large effects and that these effects may well occur at a later stage or at a distance from the initial input. Sometimes change doesn't occur in the places where we expect it and it does not always occur in the way that we had anticipated.

---

In this research we have described these proximal and distal impacts as ripple effects. Thinking about change as a series of ripple effects connects the proximal and distal effects together in a fluid set of chain reactions that flow in and around the social geography of families and neighbourhoods. This draws attention to the ongoing change momentum that well managed initiatives can generate and also to the way that changes do not necessarily or only occur in the areas immediately proximal to the initial input. In earlier work we have identified the way that ripples operate in community or neighbourhood-level initiatives:

**In this layer we return to the community level and consider the time immediately following the Party in the Park. In addition to being a ripple from the original playground initiative, we can see in this narrative the way that each ripple itself becomes a pebble creating its own concentric circles of influence and change. This part of the story alerts us to the rich and numerous possibilities that emerge from well-managed community initiatives; their potential effects are exponential because of their complexity and the numerous actors who become involved (Handley et al., 2009, p. 15).**

By maintaining interest in the way that change momentum continues on when initiatives have ended we have been able to learn about the way that community-level interactions can produce the bigger sorts of changes we seek in family violence prevention work. In this section we explore the early ripple effects from the VFCP but because ultimately everything done at Te Aroha Noa is connected and the initiatives supported by Te Aroha Noa are intimately connected to the life of the Highbury neighbourhood, we also notice the ongoing ripple effects from an earlier neighbourhood level initiative (Handley et al., 2009) called the 'playground initiative'.

## TRACING THE RIPPLES FROM THE VFCP

### PROXIMAL EFFECTS

As 2009 drew to a close activities were taking place within other parts of Te Aroha Noa that suggested the energy and momentum had built up within the VFCP and was spilling over into everyday life of the community centre. For instance, in 2009 Aroha Noa had begun a Community Development for Men initiative that had its roots in the previous decade's imagining about a Community Centre that drew in all whānau members. The Centre's website explains the genesis of this initiative:

**Te Aroha Noa is very concerned at the significant increase in family stress/family violence incidents due to rising unemployment and financial hardship. Te Aroha Noa in its strategic planning has decided that if we are to truly fulfil our vision of creating strong communities of healthy families we must engage the men of our community. The deepening economic recession and rising unemployment only hastens this strategic objective. Our methodology will be to employ a member of staff to engage with men in the community using a community development methodology (<http://www.tearohanoa.org.nz/community-development-with-men.html>).**

As with all things at Te Aroha Noa this initiative was seen as a new pebble to be dropped into the pond of Highbury. It would generate ripples of its own that would wash around the neighbourhood but it was also recognised that ripples from other activities within Te Aroha Noa would bump up against it generating in the process new waves of change. The VFCP project notes indicate the first connection between that initiative and the Community Development for Men initiative:

***Brad, from the Community Development for Men initiative, told us about a U Tube clip relating to violence towards men. He could see the value of the VFCP taking a broad understanding of violence within communities and families and not limiting our focus to violence against women and children. To make this work, we needed to be honest about violence in all its forms within our community. Brad's sharing with the VFCP also created the possibility for the Community Development for Men initiative and the VFCP to work out how to work together more effectively [Research fieldnotes, 2009].***





In other areas of the organisation, the impact of the VFCP was also being felt. In this area the VFCP seemed to have given mothers permission to start talking about some of the deeper and more challenging issues they were facing. It was as if once people experienced bringing discussions about violence in the neighbourhood out in public through the *community conversations* that permission had been given to talk more openly about dreams and fears that people had for their children, to speak the things that parents hold closest to themselves. This ripple began in the first year of the initiative and its early appearance underlines the complex nature of change processes. Changes happening in a new initiative, the VFCP, very quickly potentiated change events in other programmes within the community centre:

*The Little Angels programme asked for a session on the Effect of Trauma on Children. This involved sharing of information and experiences among parents and generated a rich session where everyone present was able to be a learner and a teacher; maximising the learning potential in the room. The women present wanted to make life more peaceful, less violent, more confident and secure for their children by learning how to give their children the skills to talk about what was happening for them, learning how to use language to describe feelings and the world they experience. The feedback from one mother was that this discussion was eye opening to the way she was treating her daughter in an overprotective way so that she would shield herself from the witnessing of future trauma as a mother [VFCP project notes, 13/8/08].*

From the beginning, the VFCP set off ripples in the lives of the individuals who were involved with Te Aroha Noa. Several ripple effects were documented in the early months of the initiative, reminding us that we do not have to wait until the end of a programme to begin to see changes happening:

*Irihapeti's story. A story of family, self, effect of violence, way out, being an adult as a child. In telling the personal stories and reflection through outsider witness many discoveries were made about violence. Irihapeti's story brought insight into the strengths she gained through living with violence as a child; 'Never give up – keep going till you are on top. Don't let anyone mess you around.' [Research fieldnotes, 2010].*

*Antonia had increasing confidence in herself and her ability as a spin-off from listening to the stories of others and had been pushing herself to be more directive in her life and the life of her family. Her partner was beginning to make different decisions and at one point apologised for punching a hole in the wall and went on to make an appointment with his*

*'anger management' counsellor. Antonia could see herself becoming the hope bearer for her whānau and hope was contagious. She had realised she needed to stop telling her partner what to do to and give him space to make his own decisions. In the process she was growing in respect for herself and was receiving respect from her partner: she said: 'Respect has entered our home' [VFCP project notes, 7/8/08].*

---

## Respect has entered our home.

---

*Seven months ago Antonia dreamed of becoming a midwife but this seemed out of reach, however, she held on to the dream. After the first couple of meetings of consulting the consultants Antonia's eye were opened to a lot of things. Jealousy being one. She made the decision to move from pleasing 'the haters' (see earlier reference to 'the haters' conversations) to pleasing herself. 'The haters' were holding her back because she was living her life for them and not herself and family. 'I'm moving fast to where I want to be but at the same time I am jealous of my partner being able to spend time with the children. There is sacrifice involved in going after my dream and move forward. I have to pick my battles when my partner is looking after our children but he is not doing it my way. I don't go backwards because I can see the bigger picture, I can taste the future, and I'm being a role model for my kids. We don't argue or fight like we did before but sometimes you can feel the tension. We are envious of each other. He is envious of me moving forward. We've been communicating better so our situation is a lot calmer. When my house is spotless I can tell something is building, I can avoid conflict when I am busy. I'm a lot calmer compared with back then, I'm proud of where I am and where I'm heading; I keep the bigger picture in mind with the kids [Community consultant interview, 2009].*

---

**I** looked at myself and thought maybe it wasn't just them who was to blame, I looked at my actions – I was doing things to please them and that was why I was going round in circles not getting very far, chasing my tail. It was one of those sessions and I said, 'no more'

---

*Jealousy is one of the 1000 names of violence. I wondered if I didn't associate with the extended family then maybe I could get ahead. Then I looked at myself and thought maybe it wasn't*

*just them who was to blame, I looked at my actions – I was doing things to please them and that was why I was going round in circles not getting very far, chasing my tail. It was one of those sessions and I said, 'no more' [VFCP project notes, 31/03/09].*

*Changes Antonia has made: from a puppet playing a game and isolating herself from these people 'the haters', separating herself, keeping fewer friends because they don't know about her past, letting go of the little stuff that was holding her back so she was getting more motivated to be on this journey of change towards her goal, picking her battles, putting her energy into things that mattered even though it was causing her to have to sacrifice and loose out in some way, it was like her dream was coming closer. She was able to see the dream more. She began not wasting her energy on the small stuff, not focusing on the fights or her partner not changing, the jealousy; I will sacrifice what I have to do get to my dream. She is a lot calmer, proud of noticing little changes, always looking to the bigger picture [Research fieldnotes, 2011].*

---

**W**hen I saw how my cousin's partner was violently treating her children I stood up and said that it was not acceptable for the boys to be in a violent environment.

---

A need to understand how change unfolds and the connections between talk and action are repeating themes throughout the project notes. It is clear from these records that the VFCP group members invested considerable energy in building their understanding of the way that their group discussions could be connected to wider family and community change, this appreciation of the need to connect talk and action is apparent right from the beginning of the initiative:

*As a ripple from the community consultant conversations I stood up for my nephews and then got dismissed from my cousin's wedding. I felt more strongly about what I should be standing up for and especially for my own family. If I'm working on this I need to be living it as well and to be part of fighting against violence in my own family. I was talking to my auntie about the violence in my home a couple of months ago; my family is not used to violence. My grandparents had five kids and they had kids; apart from two of my cousins, whose father was violent towards them, the rest of us haven't had violence as part of life. The families that we connected into have violence present and what does that look like when we*

*are not used to it? My Pop had a mouth on him and would threaten to clip us around the ear but we would say 'you have to catch us first' and it would turn into a bit of a joke.*

*My cousin was getting married and I was invited to be part of the wedding party. When I saw how my cousin's partner was violently treating her children I stood up and said that it was not acceptable for the boys to be in a violent environment. As a result I was uninvited to the wedding. Interestingly after the wedding and in family gatherings the subject of my absence was discussed however the reason stated for my obvious absence was never the truth. I had no problem telling people why I wasn't going to the wedding but I suspect it was a very different story from my cousin. When in one situation it was being discussed in my presence I stood my ground and said why I took a stand for the boys. My cousin and I haven't talked for a long time and I used to go and visit her often, last time I saw her about 12 months after the wedding; she said how much she missed my visits. The extended family lived next door and they didn't say anything to confront the violence.*

*The second time I stood against violence was in my house for the sake of the people who lived in our house; stupid behaviour is unwelcome and doesn't belong there in my space. As a result a family member is unwelcome at an event where this behaviour could ruin a special day. I once again decided on the bottom line of what is right for my family and the space I choose to live in; I would like the expectations I have, to be known and respected. After I stood up for my nephews my partner said, 'It is really great that you are so passionate about it and you are standing up for what you believe in, I really love that about you'.*

*No-one in the family has questioned the behaviour in which my flatmate was scared and grabbed my hand. I thought, 'how dare you make someone scared in their own home, especially when you are a visitor, how disrespectful'. There has been no apology to me or others. People in the family are starting to no longer accept the behaviour that's always been a consequence of drinking. Having been part of the VFCP I had to challenge a system that has been going on for the last 28 years. I am making a stand for the culture of our family; that we are going to grow. I don't know if I can change their system but I know they know where I stand and there is nothing I'm wavering on .*

*The Community Conversations made family violence more prominent in my mind which meant that I reacted quite strongly to what I saw. Previously I may have kept my voice quiet or just said something on the quiet to one of the cousins who would not have reacted at all. Coming from that group and the conversations*

put more strength to my understanding and in my bottom line. I have been working with a young man that has a brain injury sustained as a result of family violence which also informed my thinking [Staff interview, 2011].

Change comes from reflecting on other people's stories and seeing other people's points of view. It is not just about stopping violence, it is about learning new ways of doing things, of seeing self and others. Antonia reflected that the last session had made a difference in the way she relates to her Mother-in-law, she can see her side now and she can let it go. She separates herself from her mother-in-law [Community member interview, 2008].

---

It is really great that you are so passionate about it (non-violence) and you are standing up for what you believe in, I really love that about you.

---

## ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Listening to the stories led the consultants to listen to others in their families. Aroha said, 'Violence is a game you get sick of playing, sick of losing, tired of it. She has hated family days because they might reveal violence. However she has just had a great family day. She got the children in the car and her partner surprised her by coming too. He had the children all singing songs on the way, played with them in the water, they had a 'collect red rocks' competition, it was so much fun. This one day when Aroha had had enough of the moaning and fighting of her children; they were calling their dad a liar after he refused to take them swimming after promising an outing with them. Aroha was listening to what was actually going on. She suddenly heard it all! Not just noticing the noise but noticing the words and what was actually going on. She was asking questions, why are the kids bitching? Why are they crying? She was listening to what Damian was saying to the kids. That was the beginning of enough is enough. Aroha told the kids that she would take them to the river for a swim. The family piled into the van to go to the river and next minute Damian was getting in the van also. They weren't even out of town and the kids were fighting, Aroha was waiting for him to explode at the kids or her and he said 'let's sing a song'. He started off a song then the kids joined in and everybody had a turn at starting a song and playing the games. The family had a massive day. Aroha was laughing and singing with the kids. The kids noticed that Aroha was with them because Damian was always the one who took the kids out and she, the grumpy old mother,

would stay at home and have a sleep or do stuff around the house. 'The kids loved the day, they acknowledged that we were together and for the first time we had finally hit it off. She is having better conversations with her partner, playing kiddies stuff with her partner and having fun since the Saturday outing. Aroha said, enough is enough and took charge [Research fieldnotes, 2009].

Aroha rang the cops. In the past she said he'll get over it and calm down, and hide. All Aroha could remember was the VFCP group and the phrase, enough is enough. She thought, 'I'm getting too old for this crap, I've stuck up for him for years, his mum tried to talk me out of it'. Aroha told his mum she was going home. She didn't have the keys so she asked Damian for them and he did his nut at me, she gave him the choice of calming down or Aroha would call the cops. Damian wanted to take the wheels off the van because he knew Aroha was going to take off and leave him behind. He got the jack out and threw it through the windscreen. 'It was scary, Damian had been good for so long, and how much anger had he built up? I called the cops as soon as the jack went through the windscreen. I told the cops I'd had enough, I thought I was doing the right thing, I have insurance but why should I take the food out of my children's mouth to fix his crap. I was sick of fixing up his stuff, he was my 8th child. I've called the cops before but he is too damn fast, he just hides,' says Aroha. So this time when Damian did muck up I drew the line and said enough was enough.' Damian's mum was making excuses for him. Aroha stopped the family tradition of making excuses in the decision to call the police. Aroha stuck with her decision. [VFCP project notes, 03/03/09].

---

She suddenly heard it all! Not just noticing the noise but noticing the words and what was actually going on... Aroha said, enough is enough and took charge.

---

One of the mums said today – 'I actually listened to what the children were saying'. When hearing the truth about what was happening 'eyes were opened', taking notice of the truth and this created the possibility for them to respond with different behaviour. Change is unpredictable, you never know when the listening to others or self will be activated; this change in tack has a ripple effect that means others need to reposition themselves as well. This happens when anything new is tried in the context of relationships. Listening to the people around and connecting with self leads to experimenting



*different ways of behaving and being with the people involved in the violence. Experimenting takes people out of their comfort zone and this is more likely to happen when people have felt the security of community where they have been truly listened to. Aroha reported that by being part of the group process of taking notice and listening to others, she had translated this experience back home where she was now more consciously taking notice and listening to her children [VFCP project records, 17/03/09].*

*Listening intently is the most significant learning for Erin. Erin talked about whenever she raises her voice with her family, or think about how she was trying to control them by telling them to do things she would realise violence was in her home; not in a dramatic way but she was more sensitive to it and her part in it. Erin is asking her children to explain things to her that she hasn't understood, rather than arguing or assuming she has. Erin thinks the deep listening and questioning within this group has given her confidence to question without judging [VFCP project records, 17/03/09].*

*Listening and being together starts ripples into others' lives. Telling the stories puts the past into perspective so that dreams can begin to grow. The dream grows to the point of beginning to grow the person, as a result of growth violence disappears. Acknowledging violence in any form and getting to the point of acknowledging enough is enough is a significant point taking a stand to move towards the dream of the future [VFCP project records, 31/03/09].*

It was possible to detect ripples appearing across the group meetings in a relatively short space of time. For instance, as we saw above, Aroha had identified a ripple in her own life from the conversations in the group that had increased her capacity to hear her children and reported this to the group. By the next group meeting, we could see that Aroha had created a ripple of her own. Another mother had realised that it was through this process of courageous talk that she noticed change occurring; change only happens when it is noticed (Munford & Sanders 1999; Sanders & Munford, 2010; Scott & O'Neil, 1996) and the group provided a regular and supportive place where change could be noticed:

*Listening to others, a further ripple became apparent in the comment from another mother who had realised that what Aroha had said applied to her also, she noted 'I heard what they [the children] were saying' and chose to follow their child/children's lead. Most of the time you wouldn't realise change is happening. Its only talking that you realise it is happening [Community member interview, 2009].*

Participation in the fortnightly meetings and in the *community conversations* had contributed to a growing attentiveness to what people around them were experiencing and an enhanced capacity to listen to their children.

## DISTAL EFFECTS

The formal part of the VFCP ran from late 2007 to late 2010. Like all initiatives however, it generated ripple effects that emanated outwards from the core of activity. During 2011 the research began looking for these distal effects and has been able to identify a number of distinct threads that can be traced to the initiative.

---

When living in violence  
you get buried in it,  
the true self emerges  
when violence is exposed.

---

## INDIVIDUAL CHANGE

People who participated in either the group story-telling processes and/or the *community conversations* reported feeling strengthened to challenge violence when they saw it in their lives. They noted that participation in a long-term process of talking and thinking about violence and its impact on their lives and the strengthened relationships they had with people from Te Aroha Noa had made them feel courageous and able to attempt to create change within their own families. By openly discussing something that had hitherto been hidden and which caused people to feel ashamed and isolated people became stronger and able to challenge violence in the more private family domain. The research interviews completed with community consultants and staff note the growth of this capacity to effectively and positively challenge violence within individual members' own families. Data also signals an increasing sophistication in the understanding group members had of the anatomy of violence and of the importance of retaining the focus on learning how to change and being courageous enough to start making change within family relationships, as the following excerpts from interviews with VFCP members indicate:

*We have learned how to create derailing conversations about violence and this has helped us to carefully challenge people within our own families to think differently and change moving to a violence free way of living [Staff interview, 2011].*



*There were times when violence neutralised us – we realised that there was a danger that we could talk violence but not do anything about it with the knowledge we have gained. How do we put our knowledge into practice? [Staff interview, 2011].*

*Being respectful of self invites respect from others, change self and others have no choice than to change in order to continue in relationship to the changed person [Staff interview, 2011].*

*When living in violence you get buried in it, the true self emerges when violence is exposed [Community member interview, 2011].*

## INDIVIDUAL CHANGE STORY 1

*I played Rugby in the weekend, the first time in ten years and there were a couple of times when I could have punched out someone's lights but I held back. I thought it is not worth getting sent off the paddock for this, turn the other cheek. The change has had a good effect on me for cricket. Last year the boys said it was one season they really enjoyed me as captain. They reckoned I was so much more relaxed and at ease, I went with the flow and didn't give a stuff. Before I'd get really uptight and really angry with guys when they weren't doing things, now I say it's just a game. It helped me to have a new look on life, there is no need to get angry over little things that tomorrow are going to be forgotten about, that way I keep my friends, and team mates. I had a problem where I had four guys drop out and leave me ringing around 30 guys trying to get a couple of guys to come in for the weekend, it was hard. It was learning how to control the anger and where to release it where no one else can see it. A lot of things now I used to blow my top at I stand there and laugh and think how ridiculous, last year I probably would have bitten his head off. I would stand back and laugh and the guy thought 'what are you laughing at' and I said 'look at the bloody idiot, he hasn't followed instructions.' I don't feel this weight on my shoulders any more, it's gone, and I don't have any reason to be angry anymore. I diffused the bomb inside, to me a lot of petty things I now just laugh or just walk away [Community member interview, 2011].*

## INDIVIDUAL CHANGE STORY 2

*Before I came to Te Aroha Noa I was a person that would not talk, I would just walk up and hit, I would not think straight, I would go and smash stuff, hurt you as much as I can. Being involved in the community conversations has pulled me back on taking responsibility for myself, my*

*actions, being aware of how angry I can get. I have toned down the anger a lot coming to Te Aroha Noa, talking to people about describing violence. I am in more control of myself; I'm in more control of how I speak and how my words come out because I tend to swear a lot. My son (he is 10 years old), used to be just like me, lash out and talk later, he now has the tendency to be the man and walk away, and he has really grown up on that. Last year at school he would have a fight every day, this year it has been 9 months since he has had a fight; many incidents have happened in between but my son has walked away from them and that made me realise that if my son can do it, I can too, so I need to role model something like that for my children. I've just learnt self control is the most important and valuable tool you can have, so if you don't have self control you don't have yourself, you are not in your frame of mind, and not all the time I am. I pat myself on the back hard out, because I never used to be like this. I see my future is a whole lot brighter than being the grey cloud it was, because I want to make changes and I want to keep making changes for the better, so my children see that life is not just dull, life is full of life, go live it.*

*Thanks to the VFCEP, it identifies a lot for me. I remove myself if I find frustration or feel that I'm starting to get frustrated. I've got to remove myself to a quiet space on my own and talk to myself: 'you're ok with this, you can handle this, let's move on from this'. The self talk is more positive, jumping on the internet looking for more vocabulary to positively tell myself, because I never knew of good words out there other than 'good effort', 'good work', there are more brilliant words out there. I'm the youngest in my family and my elders before me are very violent or were very violent in their relationships and I think if I show my elders that the youngest in the family can do then they should be able to follow.*

---

**B**efore I came to Te Aroha Noa I was a person that would not talk, I would just walk up and hit, I would not think straight, I would go and smash stuff, hurt you as much as I can. Being involved in the community conversations has pulled me back on taking responsibility for myself, my actions, being aware of how angry I can get.

---

*It is like a natural behaviour I'm constantly trying to keep on. It is a lot of work but in the end I find myself at the end of the day feeling better than feeling gross about myself or my actions. Self responsibility is what I'm teaching myself. When people were sharing their stories in the community conversations I reflected on myself with those stories, I put myself in that situation. I looked at how it affected the wider family not just myself in there. It also made me think I'm not the only one in this boat; but I need to take responsibility for what I do and show the people who are sharing their stories that there is a light at the end of that tunnel, it is not all dark, but only you can change that, not your partner, not your family. That is what I learnt. Taking the risk of coming here, wow, that was the biggest thing I could ever do in my life; to let strangers into my life and let them know the bad side of my life, where I'm at now and how me and my kids have come out on top. We are not quite on top of the mountain but we are half way there. I've been freely telling families my story, that have known me as a violent person, about how I have changed and I see the changes constantly and if I don't make those changes quickly then it is too late to even think about reflecting back. Even friends are like, 'wow, are you alright?' They check my head, check my temperature, 'yeah, I'm fine.' They have noticed a big change, they are happier to come and see me at my home now, before it was just on the street, 'hi' and that was it. 'Why can't you come to my house and have a cup of tea,' 'Because you were a scary woman back then' OMG!. I never saw myself like that. I feel better with who I am now because I can control myself. My family see that I'm much happier, not someone that is forever grumpy. Me and my son have 10 minutes at night time, and we talk about what were the violent points of our day. He says, 'I could have had one today, but I walked away from it'. I want my son to know that it is not just all the adults that teach the kids; the kids teach the adults too, and if he has something new to give me, or new advice or new anything, share it with me because we'll both do it together. He can run away, or walk away from the situation now and not get caught up in the whole anger moment, and I reward my son for that [Community participant, interview 2011].*

## INDIVIDUAL CHANGE STORY 3

*I came to the Web Busting morning because I was raised in domestic violence through my mother and father and I went through domestic violence with my ex-partner. I wanted to come because I thought it would be interesting and I thought I would have some input. I remember the Ghost Busters theme and remember doing some of the exercises; like how far we were on the web of violence and rating our own selves*

*as far as being violent ourselves. I was in the middle which was an eye opener for me; no-one put me in that spot, I did. I grew up with domestic violence and I also learnt ways of being violent by watching it in the home. When I was in my own relationship, unable to deal with its stresses, when things went bad, I would react violently, and I never knew it was from my past. Going to that Web Busters made me realise that I copied some of the things that my parents did. I remember growing up and things were always being broken. I used to wonder when I got home from school why the chair, the clock was broken. Then in my own relationship I remember getting angry and I'd break his things on purpose and it made me feel good to break his things. Because I couldn't beat him up I'd break his things, then he'd hit me. When my children were at school or day care and before they got home I'd start cleaning up, putting things that were broken away, try to hide it. It wasn't till I went to that Web Busters that I started thinking, Is that the reason?*

---

**W**hen I was in my own relationship, unable to deal with its stresses, when things went bad, I would react violently, and I never knew it was from my past. Going to that Web Busters made me realise that I copied some of the things that my parents did. I remember growing up and things were always being broken... ..Then in my own relationship I remember getting angry and I'd break his things on purpose and it made me feel good to break his things.

---

*Doing the Web Busters I got to hear everyone else's input, I wasn't so afraid of saying my story and I could relate to other people. I met Brad there that day and he said his side of the story and I could relate to him. When my parents split and got divorced I always thought it was my fault. I remember being told all the time that we never had enough food. I'd always ask, 'could I have some more?' and my mum would say 'there is not enough' or 'it's all gone'. When they split up one way I could help was to eat less, so I naturally, without thinking too much, just stopped eating. I never knew why I was anorexic. Web Busters opened me up to the reasons why. My mum used to say I was sick, 'you need to eat because you are sick'. So I grew up thinking 'I'm sick'. I'd say to people when they asked what I was doing, 'I've got to go home because I'm sick', I'd never think why.*



*It was a real big eye opener for me to reflect on these things in my life and to ask my mum and dad questions about what happened then. I told my mum about things that happened in my life that was because of the domestic violence and being told those things. I'd argue and fight, and I'd hear them arguing about food, about not having enough food, or not having any money for food. Doing the Web Busters was part of the opening up and relating to other people's stories and being able to share that. Once I started hearing other people in the group it made me more confident to say 'that happened to me too' and I shared too. That was the first time I actually did share what has happened in my life, which was the first time I actually said I had been anorexic, from then everybody knew.*

*I have the persona of being happy and a bubbly personality to be able to open up. We talked about how you can put on a show and that is not how you really feel. I used to do that with the kids; they wouldn't realise that I was sad or unhappy or hurt. Web Busters opened my mind; the kids do know it is going on and it does affect them because they can't pin point exactly what is going but they know it is not right what is happening. I now tell my kids what is going on, or explain if we've had an argument, 'we are just talking but we'll sort it'. I grew up thinking that it was our fault, and I tell my children what happens with mum and dad isn't your fault.*

*After the Web Busters I went home and told my partner everything; I was quite happy and excited to be myself and tell my story. In the small groups I liked the conversations, more personal things that you could share. Everyone got this little boost of confidence in the smaller group, in the big group everyone wanted a turn and I felt the same. I felt like I could go on and on with the memories that we had or things that happened that you could relate to in others' stories. It was not your normal Monday morning everyday conversation; you don't bring that up with friends or people you work with. I liked how they made it humorous because I like to joke about things. Things that are quite deep, personal and serious I always laugh about; I think it is nerves.*

*I could tell by how Donna and Brad acted during the ghost busters he was violence. Then when Donna was violence too but no-one picked it up. I said Donna was the violent one and I thought how do I know that? Because I have done that, I've been there. It opened quite a few discussions because it is not always the male, the woman can be violent as well and we do the same things – sneaky and violent it is 50/50.*

*In my opinion I was quite safe to open up and I felt comfortable because of the way the morning was implemented. There was humour with the*

*Ghost Busters theme; the different activities made you want to share and participate because everyone is having fun with it. You can get out all the deep stuff with the way that it was done; I think Bruce told me to stop talking at one point. I was passionate about it because everyone goes through it and can relate to each other and I wanted to explore it more in different areas – like being anorexic and how I am now and that still affects me.*

*I still put on my persona of happiness at times, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously but I know why I do it; hiding how I really feel. I am learning now to say when I am sad or upset. I am or learning how to say 'I don't like that comment that you said' because of these reasons or whatever.*

*The timing of the Web Busting was right because there was a lot of changes in my life and there was a lot of pressure to do all these things that I have to do, get organised, but also I was actually searching for what I really wanted; that was to be violent free, happy at home and in the community. It is still a process now but at the same time doing Web Busters really opened my mind to the bad stuff of what I had gone through and what I was still in. But at the same time I remember thinking, 'oh yeah who hasn't had a fight, who hasn't smashed a few plates?' I remember thinking, 'who cares about it' and then by the end of it I thought, 'oh this is actually quite serious, there are children involved'.*

*That is what I realised with my kids. My daughter is seven and I was just picking up on some of the things she started doing. I started noticing that I would go to be close to her and she'd go like that (turn away to protect herself) because I would throw his stuff out the door while she is standing there; I didn't realise the impact on her. When I go to get her, she'd again (turn away) thinking I was going to throw something at her. That is when I clicked that actually they do know, it does hurt, and I didn't want her to grow up think that was Ok. Web Busters was a big eye opener for me but it was good.*

*I have ongoing conversations with my kids because my son was quite violent. He would punch kids; instead of saying can I have the crayons or whatever he would go over and snatch the crayon and if they said anything or went to tell someone he would just punch them. I didn't think him seeing it was actually a big thing because I thought they are just babies they don't know, but really it comes out later on and that is exactly what he was doing. I started clicking on to the fact that I was hypocritical saying don't hit, then daddy's up there hitting. I was quite excited and passionate about keeping the Web Busters going;*

*it wasn't long enough for me. I think it was a big impact for me because I made the choice that I know I needed something at that time and I didn't know what and I also had a lot of questions [Community member, interview 2011].*

## INDIVIDUAL CHANGE STORY 4

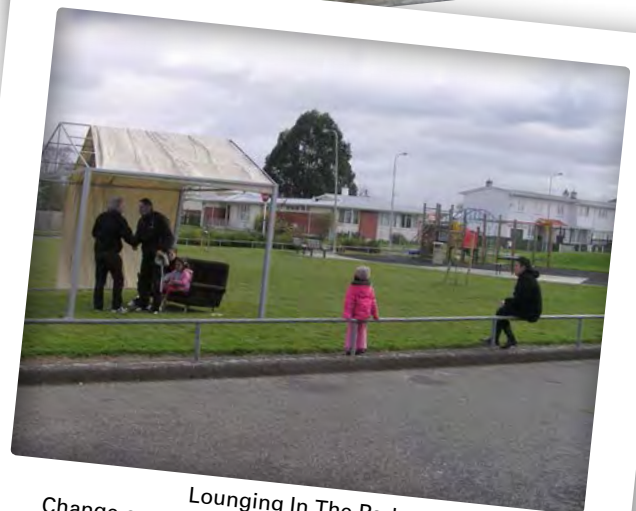
*I enjoyed telling my story and also I listened and I do what they had to say. There was no advice but everybody could relate to violence and try to turn the pictures around or tell their stories to that kind of situation, I didn't feel like I was the only one. I know there are heaps of people but I wanted to see if violence was affecting other people the same way it affected me. When I told my story at the Violence Exposed community conversation there were a lot of people there. Other people were freaked out on how hidden the violence was. People were shocked how easy it was for violence to be hidden in the home.*

*I felt good coming and talking to the group, it was like a weight taken off my shoulders. I felt good while here for the day but as soon as I get to my mailbox I felt the weight returning, like when my younger brother and I were together, 'is it safe to go home? What is going to happen when we get in the door?' It was the feeling of being happy for an hour or two why I kept coming. That feeling also is present when I'm working or occupied; I'm happy. It is horrible because even when my partner is not there with us you can feel him in the stuff in the house; the holes in the walls. I'm sick of this house; it has gone to the pack. I used to like coming to work every day and didn't have to go home; I could get out of the house, it was my free time, my time out.*

*I feel powerless to do anything. I'm tired of trying and tired of being nice, tired of being a mummy. I've always been the minder, I don't want to be looked after, I've always been independent, and I have to learn to be stronger.*

*I hate people going through the same crap and I jump in straight away. I seem to know how to protect them more than what I can protect myself.*

*There is nothing that will stop violence out there. Nothing is going to stop it, it may ease it, but most of the violence that happens around here is in homes is more the alcohol, which is about 95% of the violence these days. Alcohol is the trigger. There is the fear of just asking for help, but then in saying that I hate listening to advice. It is easier for people to tell you what to do but it is hard to do it.*



Lounging In The Park;  
Change one person, begin to change a community

*I was surprised on the day that I did tell my kids to get in the van, and they even asked me if I was all right. The thought came out of the blue when I was sick of hearing and seeing my kids get hurt by the disappointments. 'Stuff you, I'll take you'. I don't know where it came from. I heard the way he was talking to them in another put down and let down and I got tired of the let downs towards the kids, and the me that can believe things can be different came out and I took control. Then he got on board with it too. I was the hero for the day. The looks on their faces was great. It was a massive day.*

*I wish someone would hurry up and find a solution to all this. It is not just the men in all this the women start it too sometimes. I start the violence too sometimes, if I know I'm right I'm going to keep going till he listens, no matter how many fireworks at the time. Even the kids try to stop me. I don't want to let him talk to me like that. If I know I'm right, and it is really affecting me I'm not going to shut up. Not all arguments are like that, but when I start I am not going to stop [Community member, post interview 2011].*

---

It seemed that by continually talking about violence people within the community had been strengthened to act and it was clear that the courage to begin to experiment with this quiet and determined type of personal change.

---

A member who had joined after the 2010 Web of Violence conversation told a story about bravely challenging violent behaviour within her family and doing this because she had felt strengthened to do so after the Web of Violence *community conversations*. This story had taken time to emerge within the group and only came to light when the group was considering finishing. As they discussed finishing the initiative, the member realised the connection between the *community conversations* and her increased confidence to speak out within her own family. Another group member recounted a story about also challenging her own family over violent behaviour, something she had not had the courage to do in the past. She said she felt like 'the whole group was sitting on her shoulder' as she did this. As she talked she realised that it was the experience of coming to the group and being safe to talk about things that had for so long been hidden, that had given her the strength to stand her ground calmly. It appeared then that the wider circle of influence the group had sought to achieve through the story telling and *community conversation* process had begun to occur some three years after the very first meeting. It seemed that by continually talking about violence people within the community

had been strengthened to act and it was clear that the courage to begin to experiment with this quiet and determined type of personal change had taken a long time to emerge.

*I can tell you about my friend and her partner who were very violent to each other physically. I was there one time when it happened and they were very drunk, intoxicated, but I ended up talking sense to them some way or another that they didn't hit each other this time; they sat down and talked. They both freaked out because they were actually hearing each other and listening to each other instead of fist hearing each other, and leaving bruises. The following day, they usually have bruises and the kids are walking around going mum and dad had a fight, this time the kids were running around smiling, happy and they were, 'Babe, do you want a cup of tea?' Usually it is, 'hey, c\*\*t, do you want beer?' I walked in and I was like, 'what happened here?' They said, 'you left a part of you here; that we saw a brightness of,' I thought wow; describe it to me because I'll take it home. My friend just said something clicked in her that changed the incident, he died a week later. She hoped life would have just carried on like that. Now he is not called the bastard or the c\*\*t, he is 'the babe that I left behind', which is sad but she has a smile now, not a sad look [Community member interview, 2011].*

---

Family violence can be aggravated by the absence of community support and that violence can easily be seen as normative when local institutions do not react and model peaceful methods of conflict resolution.

---

## ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

The people who are part of Te Aroha Noa have learned how to act in ways that are congruent with the learning from the initiative and that the organisation's responses to events can have a positive impact on the wider community. When violence came into Te Aroha Noa's physical space they modelled pro-active and constructive ways of responding. For instance, in August 2010 Te Aroha Noa experienced a sentinel event. A fight occurred between two mothers in the car park; until this time the centre had been a place of peace and had a kaupapa of conflict being left at the roadside. The immediate reaction by staff who witnessed this event was to minimise it, to ignore it and encourage the protagonists to move on. However VFCP group members saw this as challenging the very core of their initiative and undermining all the painful work that had been done in the project.



Much like Crane (1991) and Bowen et al. (2000) they were concerned at the ripple effects that ignoring this incident might have; would this lead to a self-reinforcing cycle were neighbours learned that the *community conversations* were incongruent with the reality of daily life in and around Te Aroha Noa? Recognising that family violence can be aggravated by the absence of community support and that violence can easily be seen as normative when local institutions do not react and model peaceful methods of conflict resolution (Bowen et al., 2000). Bruce, the Chief Executive, recalls the decision that a proactive response was required:

*It sat there as a black hole in the organisation, it was a critical moment for us and we had to take a stand. We cannot ignore this, that is what we have been saying in the group and in the community conversations; that violence thrives in silence. We created a restorative process where the parties involved came together and where we came together as an organisation of staff, and families to heal and, importantly, to reaffirm our commitment that we would not stand for violence of any type to occur in our community. We needed to build a process that we could use both within the organisation but also which people who look to us for leadership could also use in their own lives to respond to violence. Looking more widely at the ripples, if you like, from this experience I think that as a group of staff our leadership has been enhanced by our daring to confront the hard issues of community. There is a greater degree of robustness and intentionality in our processes. Somehow we are tougher. We are now much more focussed on creating transformational change through our involvement in this project rather than incremental change. Somehow also in knowing our practice more deeply we are unleashed with greater power to impart this more consciously to others [CEO, interview, 2010].*

*For me with the whole car park incident I can't bring myself to help anybody like that anymore. Nobody looked at me different after the incident, in the car park, and blamed me. But I felt like I'd let the organisation down because I brought violence into the place. But then, when I went home and reflected on it, I didn't actually bring the violence into this Centre, it was her that came down to the Centre. I didn't have a clue what she was talking about, I was like, 'what are you on about?' or why it even occurred and I was like whatever then, let it be. I had to apologise to management, which was okay, I still came out smiling and they were still laughing. I didn't feel any different with the whole organisation, but **I felt I had let the name down, Te Aroha Noa, we asked for this to be a safe place for people to come** [Community member interview, 2011].*

*Engaging with systems in which power and control is an issue and relationships have been polarised is a challenge. This requires careful listening to the people and systems involved. Collaboration with other organisations in which respectful, authentic, and honesty within relationships isn't present creates the opportunity for violence to be present. When this happens power presents itself within the working relationships and creativity is minimised while structures and control become the mode in which work is performed. When this happens one way of overcoming and restoring working relationships is in restoring the power base to equality for everyone [Staff member, interview, 2010].*

*Brad had the situation with a family where he took a very powerful act in order to face the family up to the level of abuse that was happening in the presence of their baby (see below: Have a safe space to think dangerously!). Brad might be cautious about this but the mother is engaging with HIPPY with new vigor. Where the sum of all of our Te Aroha Noa relationships end up, is more important than individual journeys, and places where people act with courage create ripple effects of their own that ultimately benefit children and families [CEO interview, 2011].*

---

**W**e created a restorative process where the parties involved came together and where we came together as an organisation of staff, and families to heal and, importantly, to reaffirm our commitment that we would not stand for violence of any type to occur in our community.

---

## THEMES RELATED TO VIOLENCE SPREAD INTO OTHER INITIATIVES

The kaupapa that grew out of the *community conversations* can now be seen in the daily work of Te Aroha Noa, staff report feeling more confident talking about violence and in responding to it in productive ways.

*As time progressed staff became more confident to talk about violence in their work. Violence wants to be kept hidden. At times when the conversation about violence is difficult and traumatic the natural response is to stop talking about it. However in the group we learned how important it was to acknowledge*

*these difficulties and to learn that by keeping talking we kept violence exposed and reduced its power. Violence is powerful and feeds on isolation and shame. The skills we learned in the VFCP have been invaluable in the other work we are doing, the practice we gained in telling difficult stories and in being able to talk about challenging things helps in this other work that carries on after the VFCP has finished [Staff interview, 2011].*

*Pania began to highlight violence and name it for clients, she felt confident now in questioning whether violence was present in homes. Dialogue about violence has taken her work to a new level. She gained confidence to have purposeful conversation about violence. The challenge was to address violence outside the community consultant process. We learned how to take difficult conversations from the VFCP process – where violence was the focus and in a sense therefore where everyone had permission to talk about it – into other domains where there may have been less comfort in talking about it and a sense that one should not ask these difficult questions [Staff interview, 2011].*

## COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS TAKE ON OTHER FORMS

While the VFCP has finished this does not mean that the community consultant and *community conversations* have finished. These processes of drawing local knowledge and local experts into the Community Centre and using the Gathering Space as a place where matters that are usually kept hidden in the private sphere can be brought out into the open and discussed publicly are now used within other programmes at Te Aroha Noa. The SKIP initiative, for instance, has now taken on the *community conversation* approach to develop more effective strategies for dealing with bullying – another issue that thrives in silence.

It has been noted that local social networks can be both enabling of change and highly resistant to it (Bellair, 1997; Morenoff, Sampson & Raudenbush, 2001; Sabol et al., 2004 p. 324). Ripples that increase the capacity of individuals within neighbourhood networks to identify violence and from there to confidently work on positive change within those networks would be a highly significant accomplishment from the VFCP. Ripples such as this would indicate that the initiative had been able to spin out into the daily life of the neighbourhood and to have potential then to have ongoing effects that in a sense became independent of Te Aroha Noa and its programmes. This set of ripples are therefore critical to the ongoing success of the initiative beyond its formal life. In 2011, there are some early indications of these sorts of ripples.

At this time they are still connected to Te Aroha Noa, either through staff or through residents who came to the *community conversations* and had their awareness raised of violence and of strategies they could use to create change. For instance, the VFCP raised awareness among staff and the wider neighbourhood who were connected with Te Aroha Noa. Staff with responsibility in the area of community development report increased confidence in their capacity to respond proactively to violence and to support residents to take action on their own when they become aware of violence. Furthermore, people from the community now know that Te Aroha Noa is a safe place to bring their experiences of violence and are confident that the organisation will support them to deal effectively with it. New community initiatives build upon the relationships established through the *community conversations* and engage wider groups of people from the community and community capacity, community efficacy and community readiness to change may grow as a result (Blau & Long, 1999; Sabol et al., 2004; Sampson et al., 1997; 1999).

In relation to some of the challenges organisations face in confronting and working to move people around attitudes and behaviours that support family violence, The CEO of Te Aroha Noa observes:

*If it takes a village to raise a child the capacity of the village is limited by the people who hear the child. Confidentiality is frustrating for this reason. We have become so suspicious of each other that we may not want any person to know our business. Genuineness and compassion in community has changed due to self absorbed thoughts; 'what benefits me?' There is so much brain capacity and knowledge here in this organisation and in this community, and yet each individual family and case per se is limited to one person's thoughts because confidentiality rules. The trust factor amongst us is questioned all the time because of the confidentiality that we all have to keep. We are bound by the ethical responsibility which takes away personal responsibility; if I follow the rules of the book then I'm covered, if I dare to think outside the square to think and get it wrong, I'm in the shit. That would not happen if you followed the book/procedures [Staff interview, 2011].*

The CEO cited an example of these challenges and of finding creative ways around them. These staff recognised that as long as people were fearful and lacked models of different behaviours for confronting violence, little would change. While people might recognise the importance of eliminating family violence the critical step that showed them how to take general messages and ideals and apply them in their daily lives were missing and without the knowledge of how to translate ideals into daily action, nothing would change. His community worker, Brad Rapira,

had been confronting family violence in homes and found it difficult to advance community-level conversations that might create safer spaces in the neighbourhood for people to become able to intervene when they knew violence was occurring in the families and whānau around them. The researcher at Te Aroha Noa interviewed Brad about how this particular initiative developed and in the process she and Brad elaborate an important set of practices that can be used to take the vision of a community worker, the individual experience of a concrete situation where violence is occurring and convert this into community action. This initiative is documented in some detail because it illustrates that the original idea of *community conversations* about violence continued in new forms, and it also elaborates how individual interactions between clients and practitioners can lead into community-based initiatives that can reach larger audiences. The interviewer reconstructed the story from the interview with Brad:

## HAVE A SAFE SPACE TO THINK DANGEROUSLY!

*On the 19 August 2011 Brad Rapira a member of the Te Aroha Noa staff, took violence out of hiding and confronted it in public. Bringing violence into the open of Farnham Park in the form of general discussion on the village green space meant an open forum for community members. Confidentiality and restrictions because of privacy legislation was not applicable in a public place. Any information or secrets that were exposed through conversation on the village green could be treated with respect but its public nature also freed Brad from the formality of procedure that would have had to be followed within framework client encounter. Brad was thinking outside the box; He said: "Let's get this village taking responsibility for themselves and negotiate around the state's requirements. The POL400's<sup>7</sup> keep mounting up, what is happening or not happening, when there are so many agencies in the community that are focused on violence in the community but the pile of names and incidents of violence continues to mount up?"*

*Brad had become concerned about a family he had been working with for over nine months. Recently the level of violence in their home had escalated and he was very concerned about the wellbeing and safety of the children. He explains how things developed: "It was a Thursday morning and a five week old baby was sleeping in the same room as the parents who were fighting and screaming hatred and profanities at*

*each other. I knew from my training that when people are in that elevated level of intensity trying to talk or communicate through voice would not work. The first sense that is lost when in an aggravated state is hearing. It took an action to calm that state, so I picked up their baby and started to walk out of their home. They stopped and looked, and asked me: 'What are you doing?' Two older children were in the home also. I challenged them: 'What are you doing?' With this level of violence in the home Brad was at the point of making a notification to CYFS. The parents started to calm down and cry about what was happening. Brad continues the story: "but I'd heard them lie to everybody else, and then turn around and say to me, 'I had to tell them what they want to know to get them off my back'".*

---

When they (the kids) are asleep in bed upstairs, do you think they can't hear what is going on? Do you think their eyes are not open when they hear their mother scream?

---

*The parents tried to talk Brad out of putting a notification through; they asked how to make changes in the family and how to make the place better. Brad was to the point: "I said 'I told you that having everyone around here drinking, getting drunk, arguing and fighting is not a positive or nurturing space for your kids. When they are asleep in bed upstairs, do you think they can't hear what is going on? Do you think their eyes are not open when they hear their mother scream? You think they are up there and they are safe. I don't want your children taken off you, but you are going to lose them yourself'". He was expressing care and feelings, crying at the thought of what could happen. When asked by the parents, 'Can you give us another chance?' It was not a chance that Brad was willing to give the parents because it was a chance that risked the children's lives. He arranged to return the following day to put a plan together hoping the parents would take the evening to think about what they needed to do. The parents remained focused on a notification trying to persuade Brad not to follow through with that action. He explains: "The parents started abusing me. They said: 'We ask you for help and you are going against us'. So I proposed a way forward, I said: 'I am going to bring another man that I'm working with, who lost his kids, to tell his story'. This man has talked about how hard it is, once you lose your children, CYFS anticipate the loss so they*

---

<sup>7</sup> POL400s are notifications to the Police regarding family violence.



slowly wean your kids off you so your kids can be placed somewhere else. These parents have fought to keep in contact with their children and are having random drug testing three times a week to prove that they can care for their children. The father is also doing personal work, enrolled at UCOL for training, doing a parenting course, in fact now they are doing everything they can to get their kids back. Brad explained that it wasn't until their kids were taken that they woke up and realised that only they could fix the situation. Brad was hoping that this story would impact on the young couple.

On Thursday Brad went home upset that these children were going to be left at the risk for one more night. He continues with the story "I got on my knees in my garage and lamented, to God, to my tipuna 'Are you with me or am I believing in something that is not true? Where are you, give me a sign, give me anything? Right now I feel quite lonely'". He came to work on Friday morning and as usual was screwing up the newspaper to light the fire. He finished with the newspaper and tossed it onto a chair while he lit the fire. Pania came out and said: 'That looks a good article in the paper, Treasuring our Tamariki' Brad says: "This was enough of a sign for me : 'He tohu wairua', a spiritual sign, a sign from the Holy Spirit. That gave me courage and belief. They were standing with me".

On Friday he returned to the house and found it reeking of alcohol, nobody was up, the kids were still in bed. He asked the parents: 'What was your attitude? You are nearly losing your children and you got drunk'. As he was talking to the young couple, people were emerging out from all the corners in the house. One said: 'We don't have mature minds like you, Brad'. He replied: 'You should have been sitting down holding your children tight and really dreaming about how you are going to hold onto them, how are you going to keep them safe?' They replied: 'That is your mature mind; we don't have mature minds like that. Who are you to judge us?' Brad expressed his concerns about how things were for the children and told them he was going to make the notification.

He continues with the story: "I came back to my office and wrote a letter that could be distributed to all the houses in the neighbourhood. It was called Treasuring our Tamariki – drawing on the idea embodied in the newspaper article and my hope was that it would encourage people in the neighbourhood to be brave enough to confront family violence around them so that we would not have to have another incident like the family I had just made a notification for. As I was writing this, Bruce [CEO] came to see me to ask what was happening with my work. We talked and Bruce confirmed the decision to make a

notification which I had already done. I showed Bruce the letter which was written as a personal reflection on what had been happening. I was concerned to make sure I did not bring disrepute in any way to Te Aroha Noa by using Te Aroha Noa letterhead if it was not a reflection of the beliefs held here. Bruce could see how it connected to the community conversations that had happened between 2007 and 2010, and he said 'Send it, you have my full support'. I put it in all the letter boxes, and also put four on big stakes out on the park on the Monday. By Tuesday morning one had been snapped and ripped off, on Wednesday morning another one had been smashed, by Thursday there was only one left standing and when I came in on Friday that had been torn down. Whether it was hatred or fear, it was something that didn't want to be disturbed. I knew that exposing violence had to be done, but to be honest, it felt a bit unnerving and like there was considerable hostility to the idea of bringing things out in the open. There were a lot of fears about children being removed, but I said in my korero that it is only one option, the second option is we can come together as a collective village and raise our children. It is only our limitations that see the single option. We hold the key and the control; when you are stuck and isolated in your own little pod, cottage or flat, you despair, you lack hope, your ambitions; your dreams just fade away with violence and anger.

As a new comer in this community, it was quite a risky strategy. I am not part of the iwi, but I have strategically worked with men in different families which has brought some acceptance. When I set up my equipment to talk in the park it was in a man's home, who I know has a lot of influence around here. So that gave a message to people that if he was on board it must be Ok. What I hadn't intended to do, but which worked quite well, was putting the sound equipment in his carport and the carport actually amplified my speakers and allowed the message to be heard for 2-3 kilometres.

Two local ladies came and sat on the couch I had put in the park and spoke out about their own battles with violence and violent partners. They have been living in this area for 29 years and have never seen anybody, let alone a man, try and open this subject up in a neutral zone. If you step out as a man to talk about violence, you show other men that there is a chance to create a difference. I think that it is important that men do this. One of the staff said she was proud to see that a man had finally taken a stance and taken a risk to be exposed amongst a lot of hatred and a lot of anger, a lot of people don't want to talk about this stuff. Some people want to let sleeping dogs lie but how many

more future leaders are going to die because of a code of silence. My vision is for the park to be developed into a neutral, external learning place and that is what we are working towards. If I had never got the sign with the newspaper I would have been second guessing what I was doing. I would have had a lot of doubt.

---

If you step out as a man to talk about violence, you show other men that there is a chance to create a difference.

---

The young woman who was at the centre of sparking off this work for me came out of her home and listened. She walked up to me, gave me a kiss and said, 'our home has really been shaken up and it probably needed to happen but I'm not going to thank you for coming. I believe in what you are saying, I can hear what you are saying, but I am not thanking you'. My view is that if changes come about for her and her family it is not about thanks.

I recorded the morning. People were leaning out the windows, were at their fences, murmuring to each other and to the staff from Te Aroha Noa who had come out to support me. The families didn't always know that the staff were from here but they were mingling. 'I want to go out and say something but I don't know if it is the right time, things like that.' I have now taken up the challenge of being out there every Friday, because some of the residents asked me to keep doing this. I think we have taken the idea of a community conversation in the original VFCP and moved it on from those beginnings. What is the next step? Maybe once a month we hold a wananga here. Which is literally a stay over knowledge sharing, and invite families, put mattresses down and each morning we hope, pray, sing discuss topics, discuss how Maori live; being in community. I like to come from that angle because I don't romanticise about it but I do understand through history, culture and language there are definitely keys that actually show how we treated our people, how we treated each other, how we stayed together, how we cared for each other, and this is something practical to get people thinking about it again. A gazebo was erected in Farnham Park and a couch deposited there for people to sit on. Should I get a better gazebo and have some table, chairs, and the BBQ there for people to sit and eat in the space. Should I turn off the microphones, sit and generally chat. If you want to come and join us you need to come out of your homes and sit down. I will wait to see the signs. It will develop now [staff interview and summary, 2011].



Planting in Farnham Park – 18 August 2012.





Council staff have supported the development of an ambitious plan for the Farnham Park area involving a Fitness Track with significant equipment, a large Gazebo, a community garden, landscaping, a mini basketball court and extended skateboard park

## RIPPLES FROM EARLIER WORK

The example from Brad's work is also reflected in other projects the organisation has undertaken. Taking issues directly into the community to work on these collectively is a cornerstone of Te Aroha Noa practice and has been noted in previous research as creating opportunities for change. The Spinafex Effect (Handley et al., 2009) documented ripples set off by a City Council review of local playgrounds. At that time Te Aroha Noa was developing its understanding of the way that complexity theory could add to its work. The routine work by the Council in refurbishing the local children's playground was seen by Te Aroha Noa as a small initial input that could be amplified into larger positive community effects. Through the process of engagement with the Council Te Aroha Noa and the Highbury community created the 'celebrate Highbury' festivals which are now annual events. As noted in the Spinafex Effect, the extent of the children's playground refurbishment did not meet the vision originally articulated by the residents of Highbury who became involved in planning the project with the Council. However, by 2011, when the current research project was documenting evidence of ripple effects from the VFCP, a new initiative by the Council had commenced concerning the playground and this came closer to the original vision of a central area for families that had play equipment as well as shaded areas where families could sit together. Staff also reported that over the years since the early planning process with the Council they had become more vigilant about graffiti on the new play equipment and more confident about questioning the Council over graffiti removal. Having established relationships with Council personnel they were confident now that when they asked the question 'why does it take longer to get graffiti removed in Highbury than elsewhere in the city?' that they would get a positive answer. In 2012 Farnham Park hui, which Te Aroha Noa has initiated as a way of keeping in touch with local residents were attended by up to 8 Council personnel, some being senior managers. Council staff have invested significant energy in assisting with the development of local resources, and the Ward representative has also taken an active interest in developments in the area. These people have supported the development of an ambitious plan for the Farnham Park area involving a Fitness Track with significant equipment, a large Gazebo, a community garden, landscaping, a mini basketball court and extended skateboard park, the work for which will begin during 2012. Over the four years since the original Park refurbishment consultation, Te Aroha Noa has worked to create a positive channel that will facilitate Council engagement with the neighbourhood. Council has responded very positively to this and plays a valuable role in the ongoing community development in this area.



The original ideas which the residents had shared for their vision of how the park could be developed have gradually over this time begun to be realised. So while, in the first engagement between Council and residents, the vision residents had for the park could not be achieved, the establishment of a process and a set of positive relationships that that consultation enabled has generated ripples that have realised that original vision.



---

Looking back over the initiative it is clear that the methodology adopted was largely intuitive but grounded strongly in local experience of the things that worked.

---

## CONCLUSIONS

The VFCP sought to take a novel approach to the issue of family violence. It proposed a new model of working that would create a space between the two major traditional approaches – therapeutic individual work with perpetrators or victims, and social marketing efforts combined with the strengthening of professional networks. In doing this it primarily built on its own experience with other initiatives from which it had learned that creating opportunities for people to come together to talk about important issues in a safe and supported environment generates energy and momentum for change (Handley et al., 2009). There was a strong feeling that work only with individuals was not going to achieve the level of impact that was required and that individuals alone could not tackle this issue, that social marketing might create awareness, but it did not provide the depth of information and support required to generate change in such an entrenched and powerful social problem and that strengthening professional networks while important, did not target the place where violence was occurring.

While Te Aroha Noa had not tackled such a powerful and confronting issue prior to the VFCP, it had come to see violence as a key issue that was holding local people back from reaching their full potential and a central goal of the organisation is to support local people to unleash their potential. Staff within the organisation were increasingly finding themselves observing that individualised work was not having the level of effect they desired in terms of reductions in overall levels of violence and further they were concerned that such work may even be contributing to the isolating effects of violence. In a sense, counselling risked leaving those brave enough to ask for help in the position of having to generate change on their own. On the other hand, the social marketing approaches also being used across the country had the benefit of raising awareness about violence but did not in and of itself give people anywhere to take that awareness so that they could develop plans for change. The challenge remained for individuals of how to translate awareness into action.

The model envisioned by Te Aroha Noa intended to span this divide between the two conventional approaches to family violence. Community Consultants were a critical and novel component of the model developed at Te Aroha Noa. Consultants as repositories of special or critical information are often used in the public sector when new initiatives are developed or reviews are undertaken. Te Aroha Noa took this idea of consultants as people with special wisdom and blended it with its own approach to knowledge development – that all people are simultaneously teachers and learners (Handley et al., 2009). In the context of the VFCP the people who lived in the local neighbourhood were seen as those with the most knowledge

and expertise on the way that violence shaped the neighbourhood and also upon what needed to happen for people to be able to move towards a violence free life. They were the experts and so it was they who needed to be the consultants in this project. Their expertise was the critical element in the project and this meant that they needed to have a central place in the initiative.

Looking back over the initiative it is clear that the methodology adopted was largely intuitive but grounded strongly in local experience of the things that worked. Without realising it, the organisation had located itself in a very fertile area of new thinking internationally about strategies to reduce family violence. There are clear parallels between the approach taken by Te Aroha Noa and approaches advocated by many contemporary writers (Bowen et al., 2000; Mancini et al., 2006; Sabol et al., 2004; Coulton et al., 1999; 2007a; 2007b; Aisenberg & Herrenkohl, 2008; Zaccaro et al., 1995) who all recommend drawing violence out into a local agenda where residents are encouraged to build relationships, engage in carefully constructed conversations and begin to talk together about how best to tackle the many complicated issues family violence raises for them and then to engage in action; action at a range of levels. In developing this initiative Te Aroha Noa was also drawing on its own unique approach to operating as a Community Centre (Munford et al., 2006; Sanders and Munford 2006). The idea of drawing on local people to seek answers to important questions is not new at Te Aroha Noa and has been documented elsewhere (Handley et al., 2009) as a valuable process for creating change and for developing services that fit well with local needs.

The territory of family violence was however a new field for Te Aroha Noa to directly address with this method and at the outset it was unclear whether or not an issue as confronting as family violence would be amenable to such an approach. How, for instance, do you go about inviting people to become such consultants? Are you making assumptions about what they have experienced, are you putting them in a difficult or possibly shameful position by suggesting that they may be experts in violence, based around their experiences? Having made the principled decision that a) the organisation needed to move out of individual work to deal with violence, and b) that to do this they needed to actively and quite publicly draw on the experience-based expertise of local people, Te Aroha Noa was left with the challenge of how to approach people and how to retain their commitment and involvement, keeping them physically and emotionally safe throughout the process.

These sorts of uncertainties characterised the time prior to the beginning of the VFCEP. Once the initiative took its first tentative steps, Te Aroha Noa found that, in common with other novel projects

it had initiated, people were willing to become involved. Reflecting on their anxieties prior to starting the VFCEP, staff recognised that they had been projecting their own feelings onto others and had they listened to these worries they would have missed a valuable opportunity to have an impact on family violence. They realised that there was a strong desire among people around the Community Centre for a violence free life; people were hungry for solutions and support to develop new strategies. What they needed was the opportunity to participate and until Te Aroha Noa raised the possibility of the initiative there was nowhere tangible for them to take their concerns or their energy for change. It is important to realise that this type of initiative would likely not work without the grounding in strong, respectful relationships and the previous experience of working together to solve challenging issues that is a feature of Te Aroha Noa. The community consultants came to the project because they trusted Te Aroha Noa to develop the initiative respectfully and safely and also because they recognised the commitment to a genuine search for solutions to a powerful issue. The same observations can be made of the *community conversations*. People approached the first event with some anxiety about the impact of discussing family violence within the community at the local community centre. Without prior experience of running successful change-focused events and without the long-term work and presence in the community such that people understood and trusted Te Aroha Noa to do this safely the initiative might not have worked so well. Projects such as this that seek to draw the private out into the public domain need to do so from a strong base of prior experience working with local people over complex issues and need to be confident they can do this in a respectful way, attending all the time to the safety issues public discussions about violence implies. A critical element in the success of the initiative lies in the strong and respectful relationships, coaching and support that are part of the Te Aroha Noa story. Those involved also knew that Te Aroha Noa would draw other organisations and resources from the community to work on the VFCEP and to extend the possibilities for change. They also knew that Te Aroha Noa would not walk away from the project even when unexpected events disrupted the process. As revealed in the narratives the organisation was experienced in dealing with challenging situations and used this experience to good effect by encouraging community members to identify the learning from such situations and how they could positively contribute to change. Participants were confident that the organisation would allow the project to take its own course and, given past experience, would know how to make use of emerging opportunities.

---

Involving local people as experts and taking the challenging strategy of creating *community conversations* is an effective way to raise awareness of violence, to explore its many facets and to understand the processes that support it and make it difficult to change.

---

There are a number of key lessons that can be drawn from the VFCP:

1. Involving local people as experts and taking the challenging strategy of creating *community conversations* is an effective way to raise awareness of violence, to explore its many facets and to understand the processes that support it and make it difficult to change. It is also an effective way of beginning to work on change strategies that move beyond individual work. This approach provides a forum where people can say what is happening in front of other people and so removes the difficulty many find in taking the first step, it also then allows for strategies to be developed where people can support each other back at home with their families.
2. Approaches such as the VFCP need to grow out of other work that has previously combined intensive individual support and community engagement over less challenging or confronting issues. This strategy needs to be grafted onto strong community organisations that are recognised in their communities as trustworthy and long-term members of the local community.
3. If the initiative is to draw in local people as experts, these need to be drawn in at the start of the project and there needs to be a commitment to continue to work as a team to the very end. Both community consultants and staff need to begin together and the organisation that hosts the project needs to recognise the critical importance of seeing the project through to the end so that local people who take the greatest risk by being involved do not feel abandoned. Agreement about the strategies for supporting all participants through the challenges that might emerge during the initiative need to be developed at the outset.
4. There needs to be willingness and the financial ability to let the initiative develop in its own way. If it goes longer than anticipated there must be the resources to support this. Without this larger commitment there is a risk of generating ill feeling and a sense of being let down. Related to this, it is important to allow the process to come to a natural end and to be willing to let it finish so that people are able to move on.
5. Frequent meetings especially in the early days are important because this allows for small, regular, incremental steps to be taken that keep people connected to the initiative. This regularity means that people are able to come back to issues close to the time and to gradually build their confidence and capacity to engage fully with the project. It also increases the chances that the project will establish a presence in their lives outside of the meetings. Paradoxically, it also increases the likelihood that people will be able to keep to ground rules relating to keeping matters discussed in meetings confidential because they are able to return to the meeting forum sufficiently often to feed in thoughts and reactions as they process them.
6. Psychodrama and narrative techniques worked well despite early concerns that these sorts of strategies might result in the initiative becoming an encounter group focused upon therapy for participants rather than focusing outwardly to the neighbourhood. It was necessary to have strong processes in place that retained the external focus and to build the discipline among all participants of reminding each other of the need to focus outwardly. Narrative and psychodrama have some valuable strategies and techniques to offer for an initiative like this that draw people into activity-based rather than passive learning. In this sense they do provide valuable mechanisms for talking about a topic that it is often very difficult to talk about publicly. The use of non-blaming language was very important here as were the narrative concepts of externalisation and personification. These techniques helped participants avoid using victim/perpetrator language which, in the context of this project, would have been counterproductive because it would have increased the sense of powerlessness of those who had been subject to violence.
7. As the project nears its end, it is important to devote some time to defining processes for keeping violence on the agenda and encouraging this to be through a diverse range of methods and forums. Although participants approached the end of the project with the concern that maybe they were giving up on the idea that they could create change, their later reflections clearly show that what had happened was that they had reached a point where they needed to begin to focus their efforts on the creation of healthy futures rather than on understanding the genesis of the damage. While the formal initiative itself came to an end in that the *community conversations* and meetings ceased, interviews and observations completed since 2010 indicate quite clearly that work around creating a violence free community has in fact intensified and become an explicit part of the other service lines within the organisation, and it has also been a key focus of new activity in the Centre, such as the Lounging in the Park initiative. Because the initiative was allowed to develop in its own way and to run its own course, the central ideas it embodied have become part of the fabric of Te Aroha Noa and of the lives of people in the surrounding neighbourhood.



8. Strategies for building confidence and capacity included:

- a. Drawing people in at the earliest stage, so that they had a strong stake in the overall process and were recognised as having a contribution to make to the conceptual and methodological development of the initiative rather than passive recipients.
- b. Having a strong relational foundation that meant participants could trust the process.
- c. Being attuned throughout the organisation to things that may have been going on in people's lives that may either impact on what happened inside the project or that may have been stimulated by involvement in the project. People do not live their lives in discrete initiatives, things spill over between daily life, project involvement and all the other things that people do, this is normal. It is part of project responsibility to watch for these connections and to offer care and support.
- d. Be vigilant for synergies- look for connections inside the project between people, between the different programmes in the organisation, and out in the community; this is where the major benefits of the project will be found and the overall effectiveness of the initiative will be proportional to the number of these synergies that people can seize upon.
- e. Allow the space and time to deal with things as they come up. Because it is being done publicly these initiatives need to have the capacity to respond issues as they arise. Responses need to be consistent, honest and respectful and fit with the overall kaupapa of the organisation. Instances of incongruence between the stated values of the organisation or initiative and the ways in which issues are resolved will undermine the effectiveness of the initiative and will generate loss of confidence in the ability of the organisation to be a reliable source of support and may place people at risk of harm.
- f. The initiative needs a strong team who can work together and who do not have any major issues between them so that they are confident in their ability to deal with matters as they arise and know that they can count on each other for support. Without this, the initiative runs the risk of losing the outward looking focus that is critical to success, and it also runs the risk of putting community members at risk. Given the intense nature of the project and its development over a long period, there needs to be clear processes for bringing in and welcoming new participants. This includes developing processes for incorporating their knowledge and resources into the project.

9. An iterative process was developed for moving from thinking and talking, to action. This was based around the following conceptual framework:

- a. Start by recognising the reality of violence
  - b. Position yourself in relation to the violence
  - c. Empower and encourage people to be reflective and sit with their own distress
  - d. See possibilities of life without violence and keep drawing each others' attention to these
  - e. Identify and build a supportive community to work on change
  - f. Continue to draw in people who are committed to the journey to a violence free community.
10. Some staff reflected upon what could have happened differently and what learning they took forward to new initiatives:

---

It also had rhythms of energy so the process needs to follow those rhythms rather than organisationally imposed constraints.

---

*Intriguingly, the process is perhaps only dependent on some key driving guardians of the process as the community participants dropped in and out of the process but the overall Project never lost its momentum or original flavour. It also had rhythms of energy so the process needs to follow those rhythms rather than organisationally imposed constraints [Staff interview, 2011].*

---

These 'ahha moments' are a critical part of the project because they represent insight, and insight is the driver of change in that when people really deeply recognise what is going on for them they become able to imagine being in a different place.

---



Operation Violence; "The Hui" drew on many skills including creativity, drama, organisation and presentation.

*In terms of just running these sorts of initiatives, I think we should consider starting earlier in the day and including lunch halfway through to provide more opportunities for relaxed informal chats that seemed to have been pivotal for of the 'ahha moments' that occurred during the process. These 'ahha moments' are a critical part of the project because they represent insight, and insight is the driver of change in that when people really deeply recognise what is going on for them they become able to imagine being in a different place. The 'ahha' is that being able to be outside of your situation looking in and once you do that, it is almost inevitable that you will start to make change because suddenly you have seen your situation differently, that is where the possibility for change is located. I definitely think it would be valuable to continue the development of the VFCP further so as to engage new people. As I see it the people who were involved did so because it fitted with the journey they were on however some people would have not been ready at the time. It would be good to have the initiative continue so that it could draw other people in as they become ready. We have some things going now in the Centre that may allow this to happen in the Lounging in the Park initiative and in He Ngakau Noa, which is for young women, these create channels for the VFCP to have ongoing effects [Staff interview, 2011].*

*My regret is that we weren't able to continue with it until it became a consistent group. If it had been able to take an even longer time to grow the people in the group would have grown more. Having said that, personal growth wasn't the purpose, I know it was outward looking, but I just felt that if it could have gone on longer the people that were there would have grown more. I suppose I had a little hope in a way, in the back of my mind that somehow it would grow into a strong tree that would be able to be sustained back in the community so when they went home they were able to be supported by each other. Aroha did say that the group were tapping her on the shoulder when she was in Rotorua and that is why she managed to do something different there. So it went a little way and we did see some evidence of it but I guess I was hopeful that somehow that would be sustained and I am not sure it has been sustained. Although the Lounging in the Park conversations are taking it forward in a new way [Staff interview, 2011].*

Over time Te Aroha Noa has observed that change does not always occur when and where they are expecting it and that sometimes a relatively small intervention can have a remarkably large impact. The organisation has looked to complexity theory to help

it understand how to foster the sorts of conditions that increase capacity of local people to fully achieve their own potential. The organisation is drawn to initiatives such as the VFCP because, in addition to fitting with their wider kaupapa concerning community led development, their understanding of complexity theory leads them to conclude that these sorts of approaches do generate significant numbers of impacts.

Complexity theory helps understand how change happens but it does not provide a framework or a methodology for developing interventions. The development of interventions or models of practice calls on organisations to articulate their philosophical orientation to practice as it is this value base that provides the guide for developing the initiative. Complexity theory attunes practitioners to potential synergies and changes in unexpected places that can be capitalised upon. It also reminds practitioners of the value of adaptability and flexibility when working with people. It encourages active involvement rather than passive receipt of service. This of course creates some issues for those who are committed to programme fidelity and it creates issues when trying to measure change and manage projects. Complexity theory also places a value on diversity – the greater the number and range of people who are involved the greater the potential range of outcomes. Complexity theory also highlights the power of relationships and creating possibilities for multiple interactions. In this sense it is counter-cultural because it stands in contrast to the current focus on evidence-based practice, where evidence is primarily numerical and empirical and tied to the immediate event. This initiative had many relational circles which brought staff, clients and community members together in a flat structure; it had many sessions over the three years and each one brought new combinations and opportunities; it had events which brought many new people into the mix and created lots of opportunities for different combinations through the programming of the sessions. All of these factors worked together to produce the positive outcomes achieved in the initiative.

---

Over time Te Aroha Noa has observed that change does not always occur when and where they are expecting it and that sometimes a relatively small intervention can have a remarkably large impact.

---



## CEO REFLECTIONS

The idea for this initiative was originally developed by the CEO of Te Aroha Noa, Bruce Madden. It grew out of his life-long work focused upon harnessing positive energy for change in communities. In the final interview reflecting on the initiative he made the following observations and it is appropriate to conclude this report with these reflections:

---

It was not a recipe; we adapted and were able to move and change as we needed to in response to what was happening around us.

---

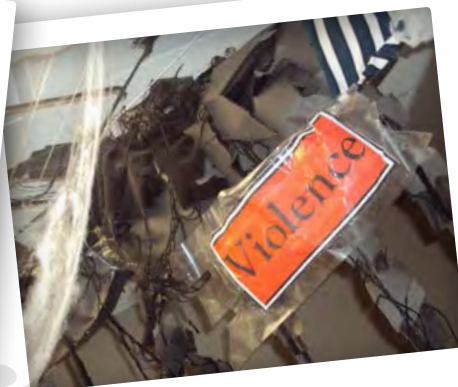
*Fidelity to the principles is a very important point to make. These include respect for the knowledge of community members, the importance of relationships, being able to continue for the length of the journey and not have to stop because funding or priorities change, strengths based perspectives, systemic analysis and multi-level interventions, link the personal therapeutic world with community level change, develop indigenous community leadership, create greater networks of support at both the family, community and organisational levels, the importance of visions that reflect the community's aspirations, reflective practice, deep listening to the currents of life whether they be in the individual, family, community or organisation. I believe what we achieved here can be transferred but this would be at the level of taking the principles and working out how to apply them in particular settings. It was not a recipe; we adapted and were able to move and change as we needed to in response to what was happening around us. We needed to be able to adapt, dealing with violence and with the fear and silence it creates means you have to keep listening to what is going on around an initiative like this, not just applying it in a lock-step approach. I think I have grown in my*

*appreciation of the importance of events that embody the principles and we have all grown in our courage in being able to take on these very challenging and sometimes frightening issues publicly to demonstrate to the families that live around us, that we understand, and that we will be here to help figure out how to move away from violence to a better place, and that we will do that with them, not for them, or in control of them. The initiative also reminded me that there is enormous creativity in this community (or any community) and this creates enormous change forces once unleashed. However, change isn't very predictable and this is why the flexibility we had in the initiative to let it develop and adapt was so important. Some of the real effects of this project are witnessed now in late 2011 and 2012 in terms of the Park development when we felt that this initiative had died a natural death. We have also seen, now some five years after the initiative began, some very significant changes in the life of individuals who were involved in this project, yet at the time I would not have predicted this level of change was likely to occur. Because we are able to stay here in this community and to support things that emerge from any initiative far down the track, we are able to see these tremendous changes emerge, that were stimulated by an initiative that was long ago. We are also able to support and encourage such changes, because we are still here [CEO final interview, 2012].*

---

The initiative also reminded me that there is enormous creativity in this community (or any community) and this creates enormous change forces once unleashed. However, change isn't very predictable and this is why the flexibility we had in the initiative to let it develop and adapt was so important.

---





## REFERENCES

- Aisenberg, E. & Herrenkohl, T. (2008) Community violence in context risk and resilience in children and families. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 23 (3) 296-315.
- Barner, J. & Carney, M. (2011) Interventions for intimate partner violence: A historical review. *Journal of Family Violence* 26, 235-244.
- Bellair, P. (1997) Social interaction and community crime: Examining the importance of neighbour networks. *Criminology*, 35, 677-703.
- Berry, M., Brandon, M., Chaskin, R., Fernandez, E., Grietens, H., Lightburn, A., McNamara, P., Munford, R., Palacio-Quintin, E., Sanders, J., Warren-Adamson, C., Zeira, A. (2006). 'Identifying sensitive outcomes of interventions in community-based centres'. *International Journal of Child and Family Welfare*, 9 (1-2): 2-10.
- Blau, G. & Long, D. (1999) The prediction, assessment, and treatment of family violence. In R. L. Hampton (Ed.), *Family violence: Prevention and treatment* (2nd ed., pp. 309-337). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bowen, G., Martin, J., Mancini, J., & Nelson, J. (2000) Community capacity. *Journal of Community Practice*, 8, (2) 1-21.
- Bright, D., Cooperrider, D. & Galloway, W. (2006). Appreciative inquiry in the office of research and development: Improving the collaborative capacity of organization. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 29 (3): 285-306.
- Bronfenbrenner, Y. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Bursik, R.Jr. (1999) The informal control of crime through neighborhood networks. *Sociological Focus*, 32, 85-104.
- Bursik, R.Jr. & Grasmick, H. (1993) *Neighborhoods and crime: The dimensions of effective community control*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Chan, Y., Lam, G. & Cheng, H. (2009) Community Capacity Building as a Strategy of Family Violence Prevention in a Problem-Stricken Community: a Theoretical Formulation. *Journal of Family Violence* 24, 559-568.
- Chaskin, R. J., Brown, P., Venkatesh, S., & Vidal, A. (2001) *Building community capacity*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Cooperrider, D. & Whitney, D. (2004). *A positive revolution in change: Appreciative Inquiry*. Taos Institute. <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/whatisai.pdf> Accessed 19 October 2007.
- Coulton, C., Crampton, D., Irwin, M., Spilsbury, J. & Korbin, J. (2007) How neighborhoods influence child maltreatment: A review of the literature and alternative pathways. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 31, 1117-1142.
- Coulton, C. & Korbin, J. (2007) Indicators of child well-being through a neighbourhood lens. *Social Indicators Research*, 84, 349-361.
- Coulton, C., Korbin, J., & Su, M. (1999) Neighborhoods and child maltreatment: A multilevel study. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 23(11), 1019-1040.
- Crane, J. (1991) The epidemic theory of ghettos and neighborhood effects on dropping out and teenage childbearing. *American Journal of Sociology*, 96, 1226-1259.
- Family and Community Services (2006). *Who cares? Community action toolkit to prevent family violence*. Ministry of Social Development, Wellington, New Zealand.
- Fetterman, D. M. & Wandersman, A. (2005) *Empowerment evaluation principles in practice*. New York, The Guildford Press.
- Flaspohler, P., Duffy, J., Wandersman, A., Stillman, L. & Maras, M. (2008) Unpacking prevention capacity: An intersection of research-to-practice models and community-centered models. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 41, 182-196.
- Friere, P. (1985). *The politics of education, culture, power and liberation*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Furstenberg, F. & Hughes, M. (1997) The influence of neighborhoods on children's development: A theoretical perspective and a research agenda. In J. Brooks-Gunn, G. J. Duncan, & J. L. Aber (Eds.), *Neighborhood poverty (Vol. 2): Policy implications in studying neighborhoods* (pp. 23-47). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Gelles, R. J. (1992) Poverty and violence toward children. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 35, 258-274.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: An outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hammond, S. (1998). Hammond, S. (1998). *The thin book of appreciative inquiry*. Bend, Oregon, Think book publishing Co.
- Handley, K., Horn, S., Kaipuke, R., Maden, B., Maden, E., Stuckey B., Munford, R. & Sanders J. (2009). *The Spinafex effect - A theory of change*. New Zealand: The Families Commission.
- Kilmer, R., Cook, J. & Munsell, E. (2010) Moving from Principles to Practice: Recommended Policy Changes to Promote Family-Centered Care. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 46, 332-341.
- Korbin, J. (1998) "Good mothers," "babykillers," and fatal child maltreatment. In N. Scheper-Hughes & C. Sargent (Eds.), *Small wars: The cultural politics of childhood* (pp. 253-276). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Korbin, J., Coulton, C., Lindstrom-Ufuti, H., & Spilsbury, J. (2000) Neighborhood views on the definition and etiology of child maltreatment. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 24(12), 1509-1527.
- Leviten-Reid, E. (2007). *Reflecting on vibrant communities* (2002-2006). Ottawa, Canada: The Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

- Lightburn, A., & Sessions, P., (2006) (Eds.) *The handbook of community-based clinical practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lynch, J. & Weirsema, B. (2001, July) *The role of individual, household, and areal characteristics in domestic violence* Paper presented at the American Statistical Association Meetings, Alexandria, VA.
- Mancini, J., Nelson, J., Bowen, G. & Martin, J. (2006) 'Preventing Intimate Partner Violence', *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 13, (3) 203-227.
- Morenoff, J., Sampson, R. & Raudenbush, S. (2001) Neighborhood inequality, collective efficacy, and the spatial dynamics of urban violence. *Criminology*, 39, 517-559.
- Morrison, K. (2005). 'Structuration theory, habitus and complexity theory: Elective affinities or old wine in new bottles?' *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 26 (3): 311-326.
- Mowbray, C., Woolley, M., Grogan-Kaylor, A., Gant, L., Gilster, M., & Williams, S. (2007) Neighborhood research from a spatially oriented strengths perspective. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 35, 667-680.
- Munford, R., Sanders, J. & Maden, B (2006). Small steps and giant leaps at Te Aroha Noa. *International Journal of Child and Family Welfare*, 2006 9 (1-2): 102-112.
- Munford, R., Sanders, J. & Maden, B. (2010). Building inclusive communities for families and children. *Developing Practice: The child youth and family journal*, 27, Summer: 38-51.
- Palacio-Quintin, E. (2006). 'A case study of a community-based family support centre in Quebec'. *International Journal of Child and Family Welfare*, 9 (1-2): 53-62.
- Pattillo-McCoy, M. E. (1999) *Black picket fences: Privilege and peril among the Black middle class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Post, L., Klevens, J., Maxwell, C., Shelley, G. & Ingram, E. (2010) An examination of whether coordinated community responses affect intimate partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 25, (1), 75-93.
- Putnam, R. (1993). The prosperous community: Social capital and community life. *American Prospect*, 18, 35-42.
- Sabol, W, Coulton, C. & Korbin, J. (2004) Building Community Capacity for Violence Prevention. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 19, 322-340.
- Saleebey, D. (Ed.). (1997). *The strengths perspective in social work practice* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.
- Saleebey, D. (2006). 'A paradigm shift in developmental perspective? The self in context'. In A. Lightburn & P. Sessions (Eds.), *The handbook of community-based clinical practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sampson, R., Morenoff, J., & Earls, F. (1999) Beyond social capital: Spatial dynamics of collective efficacy for children. *American Sociological Review*, 64, 633-660.
- Sampson, R., Raudenbush, S., & Earls, F. (1997) Neighborhoods and violent crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science*, 277, 918-924.
- Sampson, R. (2001) How do communities undergird or undermine human development? Relevant contexts and social mechanisms. In A. Booth & A. Crouter (Eds.), *Does it take a village? Community effects on children, adolescents, and families* (pp. 3-30). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Sanders, J. & Munford, R. (2006). Community centre practice – Potential and possibilities for creating change, *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 2006, 20 (1): 39-50.
- Sanders, J. & Munford R. (2010). *Working with families: Strengths-based approaches*. Wellington, NZ: Dunmore Publishing Ltd.
- Sanders, J., Munford, R. & Liebenberg, L. (2011). Young People, their Families and Social Supports: Understanding resilience with complexity theory. In M. Ungar (Ed.), *The Social Ecology of Resilience*. Verlag: Springer.
- Scott, D. & O'Neil, D. (1996) *Beyond Child Rescue: Developing child centred practice at St Lukes*. Melbourne: Allen and Unwin.
- Taylor, J., Cheers, B., Weetra, C. & Gentle, I. (2003) Supporting community solutions to family violence. *Australian Social Work*, 57, (1), 71 — 83.
- Thompson, R. (1995) *Preventing child maltreatment through social support. A critical analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ungar, M. (2011). (Ed.), *The Social Ecology of Resilience*. Verlag: Springer.
- Wilson, W. J. (1996) *When work disappears*. New York: Knopf.
- Warren-Adamson, C. (Ed.). (2001). *Family centres and their international role in action*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Warren-Adamson, C., & Lightburn, A. (2006). 'Developing a community-based model for integrated family centre practice'. In A. Lightburn & P. Sessions (Eds.), *The handbook of community-based clinical practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Warren-Adamson, C. (2006). 'Accounting for change in family centers: Making sense of outcomes in Clayhill Family Centre in Southern England'. *International Journal of Child and Family Welfare*, 9 (1-2): 72-91.
- Zaccaro, S., Blair, V., Peterson, C., & Zazanis, M. (1995) Collective efficacy. In J. E. Maddux (Ed.), *Self-efficacy, adaptation, and adjustment: Theory, research, and application* (pp. 305-328). New York: Plenum Press.
- Zeira, A. (2006). 'What do we need for a successful intervention? The case of one Israeli family in deep distress'. *International Journal of Child and Family Welfare*, 9 (1-2): 92-101.

