

# **Project ICAV (working title) Information for Children Affected by Family Violence**

Managed by UNICEF NZ with support and endorsement from the  
Office the Children's Commissioner

## **Report on Phase 1**

Prepared by Kirsty Rees/Barbara Lambourn

### **Background**

The premise for this report relates to the objective of the project as defined by the Project Advisory Group '*That a comprehensive resource is needed to assist children to access information about family violence*'

The driver for the project is The United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) and in particular Article 19 which is concerned with protecting children from violence, abuse and neglect and Article 13 which affirms the right of children to access information and that it should be in a form that is appropriate for them.

A paper written by David Kenkel (2008), Advisor to the Office of the Children's Commissioner, stated 'there is a genuine need for all children to be able to access information around family violence'. He explained the need for children to get such information through appropriate avenues. He referred to the limited resources currently available for children and containing a common theme suggesting that children 'talk to a trusted adult'.

This advice is well meant but Kenkel says that it is well accepted by child therapists that most children talk to other children about their worries and usually disclose difficulties they are experiencing to other children in the first instance.

This view supports the premise of a need for all children, whether or not they are directly affected, to have a source of information about family violence and to be in a position to pass on information to help themselves and/or other children.

Kenkel suggested that the key messages for children who become aware of family violence through their own or another's experience are:

- It is not your fault
- You can not fix it
- You are not alone
- There is help available and you are allowed to find out about it

Barbara Lambourn from UNICEF NZ put together a project proposal (2008) under the mandate of Articles 13 and 19 of the UNCROC agreement. The proposal stated 'children will often tell other children about violence, rather than speak with an adult'. This reflects the premise of a need to provide all children, from ages of 5-12 years old, with relevant avenues of information about protection from and help for family violence.

UNICEF NZ sees it as an obligation of the UNCROC to facilitate this process.

In scoping the project it was established that the target age group for a resource be 5-13 years old. It became clear that while there is a reasonable amount of information available for the youth (13+) age group, there is very little for younger children.

### **Advisory group information**

The Advisory Group for the project, consisting of 6 experienced child protection practitioners, was convened in July 2008.

It agreed that:

- all children between the ages of 5-12 years old need to receive information about family violence
- to make proper and effective provision for this, children needed to be consulted about how they access and test information and ascertain what level of trust they have in the information
- children also needed opportunity to comment on different ideas for a resource and what would make it appealing to children
- that the key messages from David Kenkel's paper were apt and appropriate

In developing the project, the Advisory Group recommended that the first phase be to consult with children in the target age group to determine how they access

information, how they work out whether information is credible and trustworthy and how they act upon information.

Kirsty Rees, an experienced children's group facilitator, who is a member of the Advisory Group, was contracted by UNICEF NZ to carry out the consultations.

Pai Pohatu agreed to consult with children in Opotiki.

Arrangements were made through selected primary and intermediate schools and permission of parent/caregivers for children to take part in the groups was obtained.

Parents and children were advised that the consultations would provide information to help develop a resource(s) for children needing information about family violence and that the purpose of the consultations was to investigate how children get and test information and what they are allowed and not allowed to use for information tools (restrictions on the internet, cell phone use etc.). Issues of family violence would not be the theme of the discussions.

A set of questions to use as a basis for conducting consultations with groups of children in Wellington, Auckland and Opotiki was developed.

The consultation phase of the project was completed in December 2008.

136 students took part in focus groups in Wellington, Auckland and Opotiki with participants aged between 5 and 13 years of age. Typically the groups lasted for between 1-1/2 to 2 hours. The facilitators found children very willing to participate, question and offer opinions and they showed a great deal of interest in the discussion

### **Scope of report**

Consultations were conducted for the sole purpose of gathering information for this project.

This report is not about how many children involved with the consultations have seen or know of someone affected by family violence or their perceptions of that experience. The groups did not specifically enquire how children get information around family violence; they enquired about children accessing information in general.

## **Summary of Consultation Findings**

The report shows that many children throughout New Zealand need to be able to access information about family violence easily and quickly.

The consultations confirmed that almost 100% of participating children would like to see a resource(s) that assists them to access information and sources of help around family violence. Children would like more information and education around the topic to enable them to be informed enough to help themselves and/or others if and when needed.

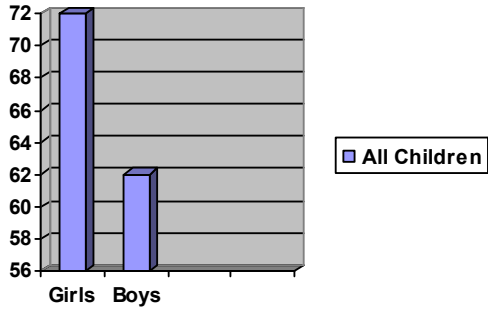
The consultations revealed, as expected by the Advisory Group, that children have a great understanding of how they find and receive information. They also showed that children are very switched on to ways of testing information to make sure it is credible and trustworthy. Children also expressed need for the information to be easily and, at times, quickly available to help their friends.

The recommendations of this report include, but are not limited to, the need for a visual resource such as a poster and a supporting pamphlet being produced describing how to find information and help. Ideally the poster would be issued to all classes of 5-13 year olds, in all schools across the country. It would include a contact phone number and a website where information can be accessed.

It would be essential for the poster to be redistributed every year and the pamphlet given to each student in primary and intermediate years at the start of each school year

### **The consultations involved a total of 136 children.**

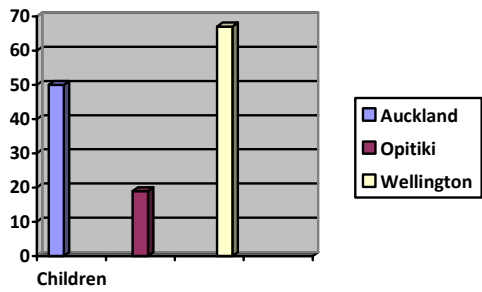
29 were aged between 5-8yrs,  
39 were aged between 9-10yrs,  
44 were aged between 11-12yrs  
24 were 13yrs old.  
72 were girls and 62 were boys.



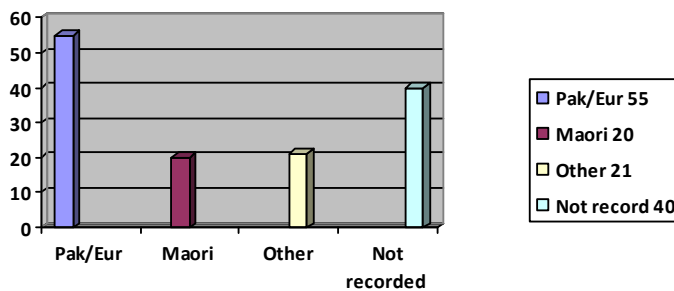
50 children were from Auckland

19 were from Opatiki

67 were from Wellington.



The majority of children identified as Pakeha/European. A large number of ethnicities were not recorded as this was an optional aspect of the permission paper returned to schools from parents.

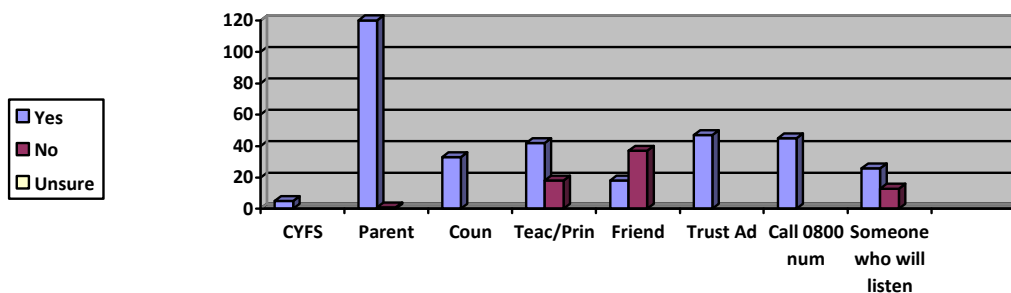


### Questions for discussion and summarised answers

1. If a friend told you that their parents were fighting at home and they were upset or worried would you talk to someone about what your friend has told you? Who would you talk with?

Most children would talk to their parents, followed by relatively equal numbers talking with their teacher, a trusted adult and calling the Whatsup line.

A lesser number would talk with a grand-parent and less again a fellow class mate. It also needs to be noted that 5 children from the Opotiki focus group said they would talk to CYFS.

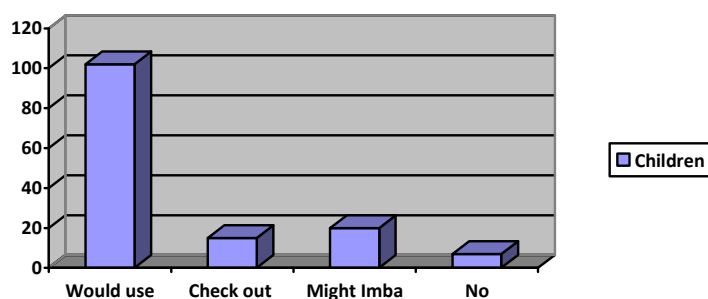


2. If a poster on your classroom wall said 'Sometimes grown ups do dumb things that hurt other people and it's not your fault; for help call 0800 Whatsup'. Would you suggest to your friend to call the number?

A very large number of children would suggest that their friend call the number. A small number would call it for the information themselves to pass on to the friend. Also many children commented on the wording suggested for this poster and perceived it as very child friendly and honest and they liked this informal language.

3. If a resource about getting help was available in your school library would you suggest that you have a look together at it in your lunch break?

Almost 90% of the children said they would go with a friend to check out the resource but only if it had already been presented to the children and they felt it to be true and honest. We also need to note that 20 children said they would not suggest the resource as their friend may be embarrassed by it.



4. When we talk about information what does that mean to children, what are ideas around this?

All children had a clear understanding of what we meant by information:

eg If you have a question and you want an answer where do you look for it? Who do you ask for help?

The majority of children would use the Internet first as well as talking with their parents. Many children would go to the library (both the school and local). Many children would also talk to other family members, followed by talking to their teacher.

They would talk with other friends and class mates throughout this process and then they would talk with other children they know and sometimes other children's parents.

They all said that they would use most, and sometimes all, of these resources for information gathering.

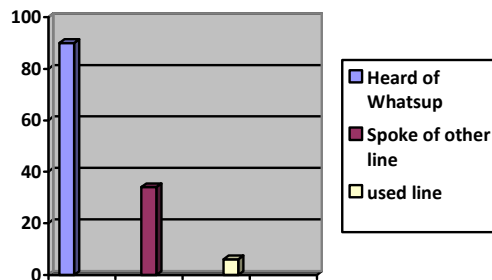
It also needs to be noted that, in Opotiki, some of the children stated they would call a social service themselves to get information, look things up in the phone book and a small number would call the 0800 number just to try it out and see what it was all about.

5. When you are researching or playing a game on the Net do you pay attention to popup links? Do you try them out to see what you will find? For example you might be on the 'What Now' web site and a popup saying "click this link for information on how to keep children safe" comes up". Would that interest you? If not what would?

All children have seen pop-up links at some time; however the majority of children would not click on them as they are not allowed to. There is very strong awareness around computer viruses and this is the main reason for children not using these links.

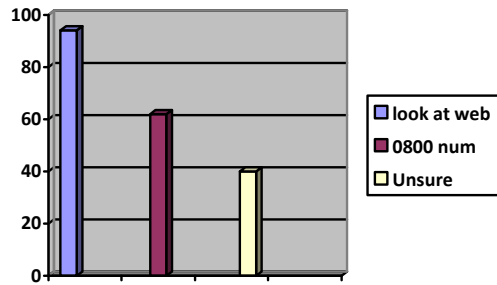
6. Have you heard of the children's help line Whatsup? It is an 0800 number (free call) to counselors who can help you with a problem you may have and you don't want to talk to an adult at home about.

The majority of children have heard of Whatsup, many had already referred to it in the discussion, and others spoke of another children's helpline called Kids- line. Also note that 6 children said they had rung the Whatsup line and that it was very helpful.



7. If you read a poster and it had contact details for a 0800 number and a website which would you be more likely to use?

Many of the children would look up the website first to check out what it was about and around half of the children thought they then might (if ever needed) use the number.



8. How many of you have access to a computer?

All children have access to a computer either at home and/or at school. Note that 6 children in Opotiki do not have a computer in their homes.

9. How many of you are allowed to use the phone at home?

Almost all of the children have a landline that they are allowed to use, some whenever they like and others when they ask. Note that 7 children in Opotiki do not have landlines.

10. How many of you have a mobile phone?

A total of 61 children from the groups said they owned a mobile phone.

11. If you have a mobile phone and you received a random text saying 'sometimes adults do dumb things and it's not your fault - if you are a child under the age of 14 and need some help call 0800...' "would you ring the number and ask what it was about?"

Almost all children would read the text, and the majority would save it to the phone in the event of them ever needing it. Note that the children that said they would use it if needed said they would need to see other similar information about the number around as this would confirm to them that it was true and trustworthy.

12. What gets your attention when you are at the library? Do you look at the bookmarks you can pick up for free (Show example); do you read posters in the advertisement area at the library and that are at the bus stop or on the wall in your class, dentist, doctors or school library?

Almost 100% of the children read the posters in the library and also around the school. A large number of children read posters at the bus stop and train station and a little under half read posters at the doctors and the dentists.

13. What draws your attention to a poster? Bright colours? Catchy slogan? Do you note the contact phone number on it if there is one?

All children agree that posters need to be bright; have a catchy slogan and many children like some sort of pictures. The children also said that posters need to be at least an A2 size with large, bold, clear and not too much, writing.

Many children also said they like the bombing/graffiti style art as well as posters with children's personal art work on them. Some said that posters in shapes can be very appealing and suggested a heart or star shape as appropriate for the work we are doing.

#### 14. What other ways do you get information?

All the children we talked to had many ideas about gathering information and getting information and they also offered ideas to help with advertising material.

The children we spoken to watch all standard channels as well as sport, music, Disney, animal and movie channels on the Sky network. Note that many children said they watch Sticky TV and that Whatsup advertise on this channel.

Children taking part in the groups offered information about the sort of information format they liked. They said that these are the sort of items that they would like to be given and would keep to use if ever the need arose.

The majority like posters with matching pamphlets, wallet sized information cards followed closely by pens, snap wrist bands and bookmarks.

Just fewer than 50% suggested bag tags, key rings, paper fans, caps, badges, dog tags, rubber wrist bands and a mascot.

A very small minority suggested post-its, reusable bags, rulers, watch straps, teddy bears, bandanas, rip off book marks, stickers, calendars and balloons.

#### **Special observations**

Children were very keen to take part in the consultation exercise described as "wanting to help all children access information about family violence".

All children were extremely sensitive to their fellow class mates and students feelings. It was interesting that many said that they would talk to their parents about a friend but they were very clear that they would not talk to other children about another's disclosure, so as not to embarrass or upset a child in need of help.

UNICEF was contacted by some parents who, although they appreciated the value of the exercise, were reluctant to have their children take part as they "did not want them upset or frightened by the discussion".

At the Intermediate school visited in Auckland, children had many questions and wanted to know how to get answers, not just related to family violence but also to do with youth justice issues. The students were highly vocal about their need for information and asked questions about how they could find out about people they know who are in trouble or a "friend of a friend that had gone away". They spoke

about Child, Youth and Family Services (CYFS) with a strong degree of clarity on what CYFS does (albeit some of it a little misconstrued).

**Our facilitator's conclusion was that as children absorb small amounts of information about violence and episodes involving other children from various sources, the good intent to protect them from worry provokes further questions with no ready avenue for credible and accurate answers known to them.**

The primary school pupils in Auckland spoke with a great deal of knowledge about violence including 'violence is not ok'.

All schools were very receptive to our consultation project. One principal in particular was very enthused, keen to be included as the project develops and offered to continue to help with anything needed in the future. She is committed to helping children to access information and assisting them to deal with it in a strong and positive way.

In Opotiki children have less access to home computers and telephones. They are also more likely to use the services in the community that are available to them to get information they need. These include contacting local social services including CYFS, as well as using the phone book and trying out any 0800 numbers themselves prior to needing them just to see what happens.

So although they appear to have less technological recourses in the home they are more than able and willing to seek access from other avenues.

## **CONCLUSION**

The consultations showed that the majority of children would like a resource to help them find out where to access or connect them to information about family violence. According to the children consulted, a poster would be the most effective central resource with a pamphlet for additional detail and possibly a pen with contact details on it.

Each resource backs up the credibility of the others and provides the familiarity that assures children the trust that it can be depended on.

