

Couples-based approach to prevention of domestic violence: An innovative initiative in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract

This paper presents an innovative model for the prevention of domestic violence and abuse. A first-of-its-kind, couples-based, whānau-centric (family-centred) family harm reduction programme titled Te Manu Tu Tuia (The Bird that Brings the Message) was implemented in the Hawke's Bay region of Aotearoa New Zealand. The programme targeted 37 couples with a combined history of 1,092 family harm reports. A mixed methods evaluation study conducted in 2017 collected quantitative secondary data from the local police and qualitative primary data from semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with couples, staff, and local stakeholders and from observation of couples-based weekend sessions. Data analysis was done using a thematic analysis. Findings revealed a significant reduction in reoffending and subsequent police callouts, with an overall reduction of 57 per cent callouts, a 46 per cent increase in participants entering employment, and 8 per cent entering further education. Based on these findings, this paper aims to begin a discussion on the need for collaborative relationships involving couples, the police, community based organisations and families for addressing domestic violence. The paper highlights the significance of this approach for understanding and addressing the dynamics of violence and coercive control and existing barriers for effective engagement.

Keywords

Domestic violence, couples-based approach, community development, social change, collaborative relationship

Introduction

Community development principles, which recognise a commitment to social justice, human rights, empowerment, self-determination, and collective action (Kenny & Connors, 2017), can be seen as offering micro-level intervention strategies. While macro level interventions address and challenge structural and systemic forces and processes in an attempt to provide lasting solutions to social problems, micro interventions attend to people's experiences to bring about positive changes in their lives. Micro interventions based on collaborative relationships can be empowering if these allow participation and power sharing among stakeholders

and if social justice and human rights are the guiding principles. Community organisations often work with people at micro-level and engage in collaborative partnerships. This offers community organisations opportunities to establish collaborative relationships with clients and other agencies. It also allows for innovation and creativity whilst still remaining congruent in relation to their goals, objectives, values and beliefs that guide their practice. Community organisations' positionality allow them to understand and address community needs. Brenda Ratcliff (Director of the New Zealand Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector) advised the incoming minister in 2005 that community based organisations are not only in the best situation to identify local needs but also to “innovate’ or take ‘risks’ in finding viable solutions” (as cited in Grey & Sedgwick, 2013, p. 7).

Recently, a collaborative relationship initiative for addressing domestic violence in Aotearoa New Zealand has given rise to a strategy for a collaborative partnership involving a state agency (local police), a community organisation (Innov8), and community members. The community organisation and local police, in partnership, developed and implemented an innovative programme for the prevention of domestic violence. At the centre of the programme were couples experiencing domestic violence, together with their families. Thus, a couples-based, family-centred collaborative partnership has given rise to an innovative strategy for social change that is bottom-up, power sharing, participatory and inclusive. This paper describes and discusses the programme from a community development perspective.

Background

Globally, domestic abuse is recognised as a substantial human rights issue. Within Aotearoa New Zealand it constitutes significant social and health issues, which affects the safety and wellbeing of whānau (family) and communities. New Zealand, with a population of 4.9 million, has the highest reported rate of intimate partner violence in the world (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2017). New Zealand police attend 200 family violence incidents a day, however, it is estimated that approximately 80 percent of incidents are not reported to the police (Women’s Refuge, 2017).

Domestic abuse not only places victims at risk of physical harm but it also involves the random, repeated and habitual use of intimidation to control a partner. Family violence covers a broad range of controlling behaviours, commonly of a physical, sexual, and/or psychological nature which typically involves fear, intimidation and emotional deprivation. It occurs within a variety of close interpersonal relationships, such as between partners, parents and children, siblings, and in other relationships where significant others are not part of the physical household (Ministry of Social Development, 2017).

The following snapshot of family violence is drawn from the New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse (NZFVC, 2017):

- In 2016, there were 118,910 family violence investigations by New Zealand Police
- Responding to family violence accounts for 41 per cent of a frontline Police Officer's time
- Between 2009 and 2015, there were 92 intimate partner violent deaths. In 98 per cent of death events where there was a recorded history of abuse, women were the primary victims, abused by their male partners
- In 2015, New Zealand Police recorded 10 homicides of children and young people under 20 by a family member.

It is estimated that one in three women will experience some type of abuse within their relationship and that one in four children witness (or experience direct) acts of abuse at home (Lievore & Mayhew, 2007). In 2016, 63 children aged 16 years or under were hospitalised for an assault perpetrated by a family member (New Zealand Police, 2018).

During the past twenty years it has become widely recognised that family violence has a considerable impact on a child's safety and wellbeing, affecting both physical and emotional health. A child may not be injured directly; however, the emotional impact of witnessing or hearing the abuse, whether this is an isolated incident or an ongoing occurrence, can be extensive. Witnessing family violence can have an impact on a child's social, emotional and psychological development. Mullender (2004) observed that children who witnessed domestic violence were much more likely to experience social and emotional problems compared to children who had not witnessed family/domestic violence. Further, Stanley (2011) reports that children exposed to domestic abuse are more likely to describe feelings of anger and frustration. She suggests that children who witness parental domestic violence can experience similar outcomes to children who are themselves being physically abused.

In recent years, there has been a move towards an acceptance that family groups experiencing family violence may stay together, or have ongoing contact, despite the potential ongoing safety risks for partners and children (Humphry and Campo, 2017). Strega et al (2013) suggest that there is a scope for "innovative and effective alternatives" (p. 1) when working with families who have experienced family violence. These collective family, or whānau, alternatives to the more traditional approach of working separately with victims or perpetrators acknowledges that blame or responsibility for the continued safety of the mother and the children is not placed on the mother alone. The abusive partner can also benefit from being included in the healing process rather than continuing to be "treated as nasty, one-dimensional, and non-redeemable" (Richardson & Wade, 2013, p. 158).

The Aotearoa New Zealand context

Within domestic violence statistics in New Zealand, Māori, New Zealand's indigenous population, are over-represented as both victims and offenders. However, Oliver (2006) proposes that domestic violence programmes are not responsive to Māori because traditional criminal justice systems often minimise the impact of structural inequality and culture. The possible impact of inequality and colonisation was also identified in the Family Violence Death Review Committee (2016, p. 11):

All violence has a whakapapa. To understand the over-representation of Māori as deceased and offenders in all family violence deaths, the historical and contemporary consequences of colonisation must be acknowledged. For Māori, the impacts were and are destructive and pervasive. Violence against Māori wāhine (women) and mokopuna (children and grandchildren) is not part of traditional Māori culture. Rather, the violence within whānau seen today reflects the patriarchal norms of the colonising culture as well as trauma from the widespread fragmentation of Māori social structures that were enforced during and after colonisation.

Accordingly, the Family Violence Death Review Committee Fifth Annual Report (2016) proposed that there needs to be a different approach when responding to family violence, “reframing empowerment and safety as collective endeavours” (p. 13). Responses should be more coordinated and effective to develop greater safety for families. The report recommends the development of a more integrated system at all levels of intervention; a system which promotes a greater emphasis on developing collaborative relationships with communities. The report further suggests the importance of more training for practitioners, and an increased focus on the identification of risk factors to help interrupt intergenerational violence and the transmission of trauma. Overall, the report advocates for stronger, preventative and creative responses to family violence. Similarly, Blacklock and Philips (2015), in Stanley and Humphreys (2015), propose that different approaches to working with family violence can be achieved through collaborative work and a multidisciplinary approach. Blacklock and Philips suggest that there needs to be a shift in paradigm, which recognises that families can be a resource, as well as a risk.

Research undertaken in the past decade highlights the importance of developing Kaupapa Māori (Māori principles and approaches) programmes; recognising the impact of colonisation, structural inequality, and the importance of whānau and communities. The Māori Strategic Plan from the Department of Corrections proposes the utilisation of traditional Māori knowledge as a framework for developing effective engagement. The plan stipulates that interventions for Māori should be localised, with the development of strengths-based Kaupapa Māori programmes, which support not only the offender but also the whānau and

community. Kaupapa Māori approaches and constructs, such as Tikanga Māori (cultural practices of Māori) are believed to have the capacity to both challenge whānau violence and provide a way to whānau ora (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2010).

Another approach, which has been developed from a Kaupapa Māori perspective, is the He Taonga Ngā Mokopuna. This programme supports children who have been exposed to family violence. Facilitators meet with the children with the aim of encouraging them to express their feelings, improving self-esteem and self-worth; awhi manaaki (building the mana of others through nurturing, growing and challenging) and tu pakari (maturity). There is also a focus on whakapapa (genealogy) to encourage the development of non-violent strategies and the creation of positive support systems which can be used to strengthen their relationships within their whānau (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2010).

Research also emphasises the centrality of relationships and the need for engagement, which is both therapeutic and empathetic. Laing, Humphrey and Cavanagh (2013) and Jenkins (2009) stress the importance of validating client experience as part of the process of intervention, whilst Latta (2003) emphasises that it is compassion and the creation of a collaborative relationship that can help a facilitator and client to work more effectively together.

The Programme: Te Manu Tu Tuia (The Bird That Brings the Message)

Family violence in Hawke's Bay has been highlighted as a community concern for a number of years by local agencies such as the Flaxmere Neighbourhood Policing Team. The negative impact on families within Flaxmere was evident, with Māori families being over-represented within family violence statistics. Information from the police indicates that more than 120 incidents of whānau violence are reported each week, however, they estimate that only 18 percent of all incidents are ever reported, equating to 670 incidents of family violence per week. In September 2015, there were three murders relating to family violence within the Hawke's Bay area (New Zealand Police, 2016).

In 2008, an integrated and holistic Tikanga Māori-based service named Wairua Tangata was introduced in Hawkes Bay. Wairua Tangata was developed to provide a kaupapa Māori counselling service in Flaxmere, to engage with and support people from the local community who had complex social and mental health needs. Throughout the delivery of the programme it became apparent that there were further areas of unmet need, particularly around family violence and the ability of existing services to respond to the complexities of whānau and domestic abuse (Abel, Marshall, Riki, & Luscombe, 2012). Following on from the Wairua Tangata programme, Innov8 Ltd, a community group "committed to exploring opportunities to develop whānau-centric initiatives, that are informed by the community and supported by funder stakeholders" (Innov8, 2018, p. x), recognised

that a different approach to family violence was needed to allow whānau to stay together without violence.

In response, Innov8 developed Te Manu Tu Tuia to inform a new whānau-centred approach to family violence intervention and to fill a gap in the existing family violence service delivery.

Throughout the development of the programme interviews were held with residents who had previously attended the Wairua Tangata programme and local agencies, to ensure that the voice of the community was clearly heard. One key message that emerged was that Whanau wanted to stay together, they wanted a program that allowed them to work together and to stay together. The programme was designed to use personal experiences, to challenge violence and to facilitate positive change for whanau. Another key aspect of the programme has been to develop community champions. Champions are couples who have previously undertaken the programme. Their role is to provide post-wānanga peer support and to provide feedback in relation to the effectiveness of the programme.

The programme proposes to challenge and change the way services are provided, to incorporate whānau-centric values where the wellbeing of the family are central to all aspects of intervention and programme delivery. The majority of family violence programmes work separately with victims and perpetrators, whereas Te Manu Tu Tuia works intensively with couples to address family violence and to improve whānau wellbeing. This approach also endorses an integrated worldview of Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) and Te Ao Tauīwi (world nations) to support Māori wellbeing, whānau/family and communities.

Te Manu Tu Tuia highlights the following objectives: to develop a whānau-centred model for delivering services which address social concern; to deliver interventions that protect and improve the wellbeing of children who experience violence; to enable whānau to become part of the solution for associated whānau violence; to encourage agencies to utilise their resources in a more holistic and collaborative manner; to provide and deliver intervention which is facilitated by the needs of the participating families; and to develop a funding package for the purpose of sourcing ongoing funding to provide this service to the community.

The programme is for couples who are identified as being at high risk of whānau violence. Couples may be referred by an agency, other organisation, or refer themselves to participate in the programme. Criteria for admission include the following: both members of the couple must be willing participants who are committed to behavioural changes; couples should not be compelled to participate in the programme as a diversionary or compliance driven measure; couples can be referred from within the wider Hawke's Bay region (Wairoa to Central Hawke's Bay); and there is no age limit although it is likely that similar aged couples will be placed together to optimise participation in a group therapeutic settings.

Te Manu Tu Tuia offers two group sessions for each couple. First, Couples Group Weekends, where five to six couples participate in each group, with up to three groups being run within each programme delivery. The groups participate in a weekend wānanga (retreat), which involves group workshops and therapy sessions, activity based learning, reflection and feedback. The weekend wānanga also include physical activities which complement the objectives of the workshops. There is a follow up workshop with the couples ten days after the initial wānanga to provide evaluation and feedback and a 'graduation' 70 days post-wānanga where individual challenges and achievements are shared and an ongoing plan of support is implemented. Secondly, a Children's Group/Whānau Weekend is held. This children's weekend wānanga/retreat involves couples and their children. During the first day, the children and their parents participate in separate workshops and then come together the following day to take part in a day of whānau activities.

Method

Using a mixed methods approach involving the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, an evaluation was undertaken with the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of the delivery of the Te Manu Tu Tuia programme, determining whether the programme reduces the prevalence of family violence, and identifying ways to facilitate change. All of the participants resided in the Hastings or Flaxmere areas of Hawke's Bay. Statistical data was supplied by the Community Police Team in Flaxmere from their records during 2015 - 2017. The data provided information about couples' ethnicities, ages, numbers of children, engagement with other agencies, police involvement pre-wānanga, and police involvement post-wānanga. Qualitative data was collected through observation of two retreat weekends involving couples; a weekend that involved only couples and the other a whānau weekend that involved children and whānau. Seven couples attended the observed whānau weekend with their children aged between 5 and 16 years. Among these couples, thirteen adult participants described themselves as Māori and one participant as Tongan. Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were subsequently undertaken with five couples, three members of the programme staff and two people from the two stakeholder groups, the Probation Service and the Hawke's Bay Police. Only those couples who had attended both the 'couples' weekend' and 'whānau weekend' were invited to participate in the interviews. Suitable times and places for interviews were arranged during July and August of 2017. The qualitative data was analysed using a thematic analysis.

Findings from the quantitative data

Analysis of the quantitative data from the New Zealand Police records showed that twenty eight of thirty seven couples (75.6%) were involved with the probation service prior to their involvement in Te Manu Tu Tuia and seventeen of thirty-seven couples (46%) were involved with social workers from Oranga Tamariki Ministry

for Children (New Zealand’s statutory child protection agency). Data on police involvement post-wānanga indicated that since attending the weekend camps, out of thirty seven couples, twenty-one have had no further police attendance, nine made preventative calls to police to avoid an escalation of family conflict, two couples had no call outs for over three months and then started having arguments again, and a further two had an increase in police attendance but with the incidents being significantly less physically violent. The remaining eleven couples recorded a decrease in police attendance and a decrease in the physical violence, post-wānanga.

Couple	12 months Pre	Wanaga	12 months post	Prevention Post- included in total	POL 13 Comparable with pre	
A	1		0	0	0	
B	13		0	0	0	
C	17		12	0	12	
D	14		15	5	10	
E	1		0	0	0	
F	5		0	0	0	
G	1		0	0	0	
H	7		2	1	1	
I	5		3	2	1	
J	7		6	0	6	
K	0		0	0	0	
L	4		4	0	4	
M	3		2	0	2	
N	7		0	0	0	
O	2		0	0	0	
P	2		0	0	0	
Q	4		2	0	2	
R	3		6	0	6	
S	4		0	0	0	
T	0		3	3	0	
U	7		1	0	1	
V	3		1	1	0	
W	4		1	1	0	

X	3		0	0	0	
Y	1		2	2	0	
Z	8		4	4	0	
A1	16		7	1	6	
A2	3		0	0	0	
A3	6		2	0	2	
A4	4		0	0	0	
A5	0		0	0	0	
A6	8		2	1	1	
A7	2		0	0	0	
A8	1		0	0	0	
A9	9		2	1	1	
A10	2		0	0	0	
A11	6		1	0	1	
TOTALS	183		78	22	56	
Comparisons		Decrease in violence (Totals)				57%
		Decrease in violence (net of prevention)				69%

Figure 1: Overall number of violent incidents pre- and post-wānanga

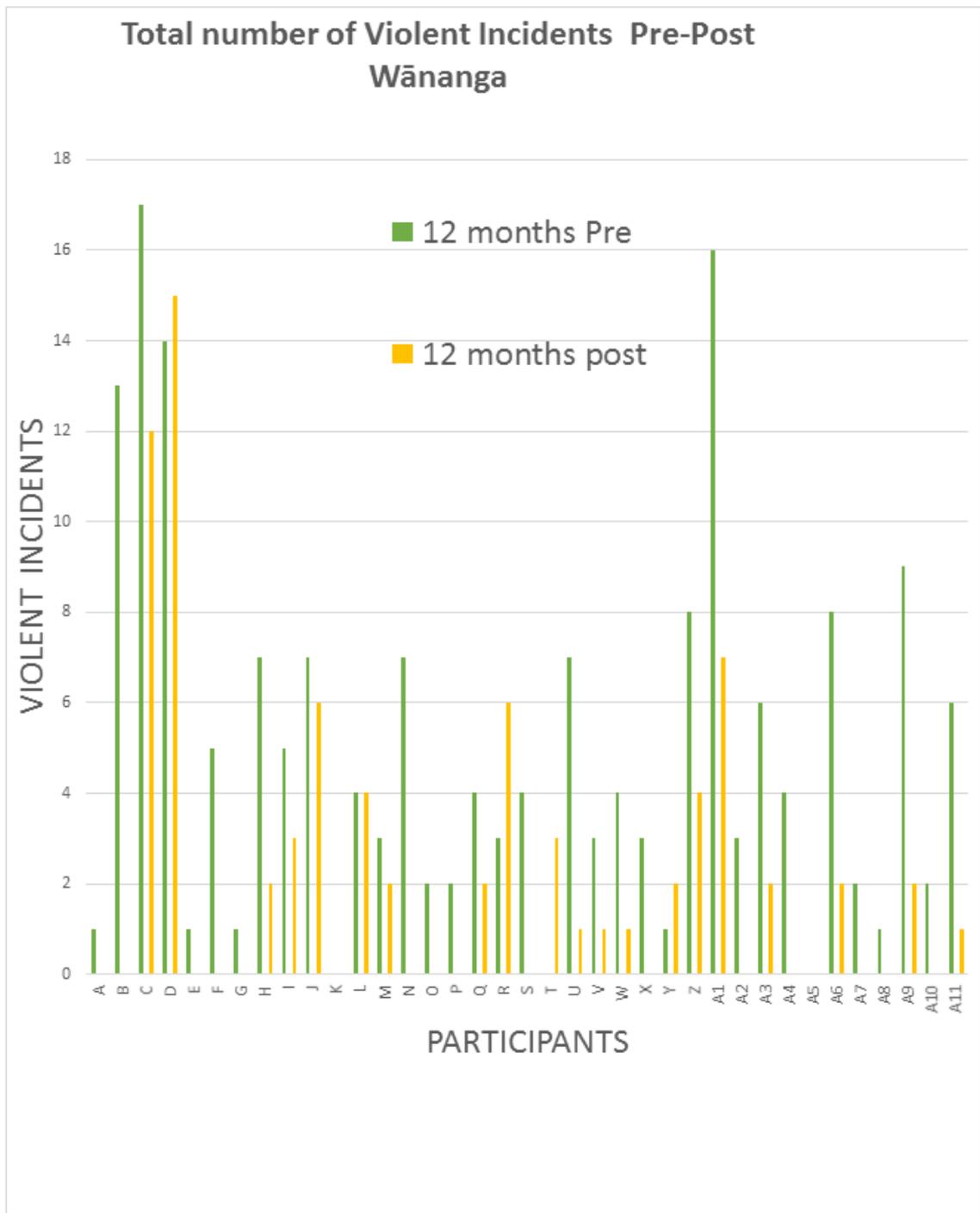


Figure 2 : Violent incidents pre- and post-wānanga

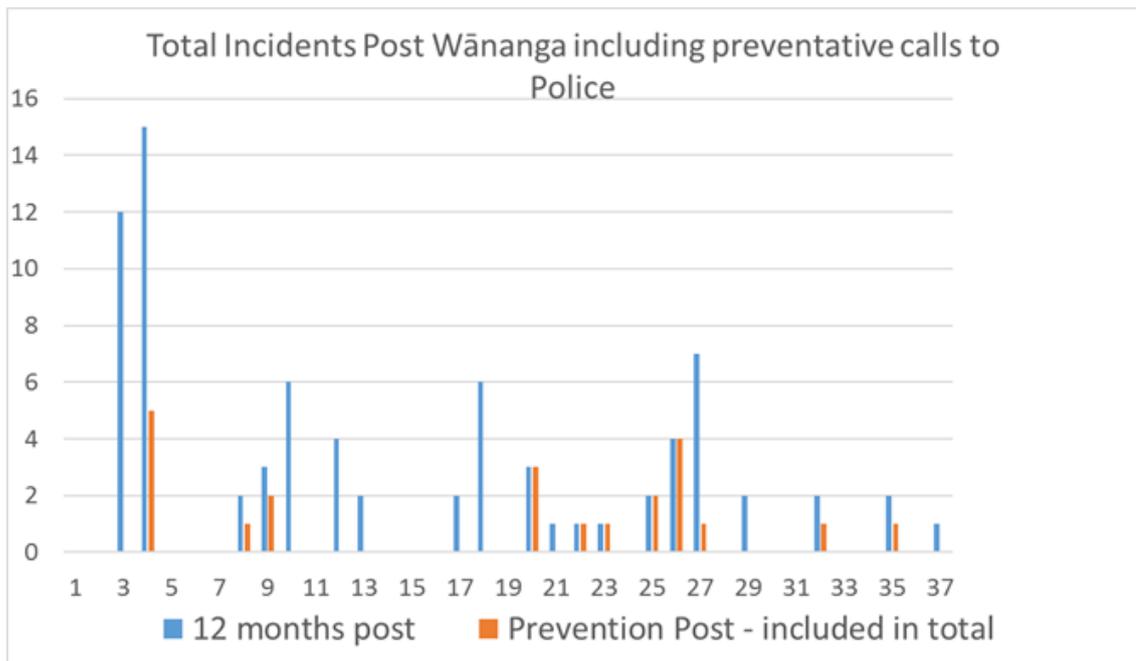


Figure 3 Total incidents post-wānanga

The data provided information in relation to the programme’s impact on recidivism. Analysis indicated that there has been a significant reduction in reoffending behaviour and subsequent police callouts. There has been an overall reduction in recorded incidents of violence post-wānanga of fifty-seven percent. However, when the preventative calls are included in the data, the actual reduction in recorded incidents of violence is sixty-nine per cent. Another significant finding is shown in the change of personal circumstances of the participants. At the start of the programme 8 percent of the participants were employed, whereas, in October 2017, 46 percent of participants were in employment and 8 percent were in education.

Findings from observation

During the evaluation, the researcher had the opportunity to observe a whānau weekend with couples who had previously attended the couples retreat programme. All of the couples were encouraged to bring their children to the retreat. During the weekend there were 7 couples and 16 children who participated in the programme, aged between 5 and 16 years.

On the first day, the children and their parents participated in separate workshops and then took part in whānau activities the following day. It is important to note that throughout the weekend workshops counsellors were available to provide support to the children if they became distressed or agitated. This support was also made available after the weekend during follow up whanau sessions.

The workshops for the parents focused on the impact of family violence on their whānau/family. Concern about children growing up with family violence was a consistent theme throughout the discussions. The group made the following comments during the workshop:

I want to understand what is going on for my kids, what I want is to be violence free.

I DO NOT WANT my kids to grow up with violence.

Want to take learning from this weekend back home. (Couple 3, interview,2017).

The aims of the children's workshops were to encourage an increase in the children's confidence, to provide an environment where creative play and therapy could take place, and to create a safe place where the tamariki (children) could speak about what they do not want to hear and what they do not want to happen in their homes in the future. Throughout the day, the group facilitators and supporters involved the children in a number of creative activities and games, with a focus on talking about the violence within their home.

In the evening, the children presented the parents with a "cloak of shame", which was covered with all the words that the children had heard when their parents were fighting. This session was one of the most emotionally challenging activities that took place during the weekend. Following the presentation, the parents were asked to pick up a word from the cloak of shame and destroy it. The children then presented a new cloak with all the positive things that they wanted to happen within their families, such as no fighting, no swearing

On the second day, the families met together and participated in a House of Safety Activity. Each whānau were asked to build their "house of safety", where each of the families were tasked with creating family rules/expectations. Kai (food) was also used as an activity to positively bring families together. The families were tasked with creating a meal together; this activity was very successful and encouraged the families to collaborate positively build cohesiveness and introduced a strength based approach to the task.

A key observation throughout the weekend was that the activities for the adults during the first day had reinforced some of the learning, beliefs and values that they had developed during the couples counselling weekend. There was evidence of a new way of thinking, letting go of the past and barriers to change. Activities encouraged the families to gain further insight into the impact of violence on themselves and on their tamariki. The parents demonstrated that they were also able to hear the views and wishes of their tamariki.

Findings from the semi-structured interviews

All of the interviewed couples reported that the level of violence in their families had decreased since participating with Te Manu Tu Tuia. They stated that involvement with the programme had given them and their families tools to work together to stop or reduce the frequency of their arguments and aggression, and the tools to address domestic violence. Couples reported using techniques from the programme to de-escalate arguments as well as accessing post programme support. Feedback from all of the couples was extremely positive and provided consistent messages about the ways in which the programme had enabled them to make sustainable changes, reducing incidences of family violence. One member of a couple made the following comments:

We have more respect and the communication is there but it is only because of those courses. It would not have happened without the camps. We wanted a happier family, violence free and it happened. We are not the same people and we know in our hearts that we will never go back to being those people. I learned how to understand my partner (Couple 1, Interview, 2017).

A staff member expressed a similar view:

I think it's life changing. Just what I saw with my first couple, just sensational and that was, it was life changing for them. There were 2 months of no violence. That is incredible for those two. In addition, couples that have been referred as well, watching them go through the change it has been fantastic. It's incredible, so it is life changing. The couples have gone from not knowing any other way other than violence to being able to stop and walk away. That is life changing (Staff Member, Interview, 2017).

All of the participants who were interviewed felt that the couples' weekend gave them the opportunity to address family based violence together; helping them to understand the impact of violence, and to identify reasons for wanting to stop the escalation of violence within their whānau. One person commented:

It managed my behaviour. It gave me skills and tools to use to kind of like get on top of my behaviour. Just the whole process of what it was we did it worked towards the goals I wanted for my family and me. I wanted my family back but I didn't want the behaviour so the only way to look at the behaviour was to face all these dark things that were inside me and they helped me and they helped me do things so like I said to ... I'm over that. I was so happy to get rid of it. All that time I was just so happy to get this paper and write everything that I thought that was holding me down, that was making me feel shame for myself and it all rings around her and my family. So, I was just that happy (Couple 1, Interview, 2017).

All of the participants, couples, staff and stakeholders, commented positively on the strength of the relationships that had developed between the programme facilitators and participants. All members of the couples stated that they felt valued and never felt that they were being judged. For example:

The programme has done everything- more than you could expect, you are safe in a good environment, you don't feel vulnerable, don't feel cast out, you feel like one as a family. The key staff was just the main thing, the core of the whole Te Manu Tu Tuia team. The team that worked there, without them, it could not be possible (Couple 4, Interview, 2017).

Each of the couples highlighted the use of effective engagement as a strength and an integral component of the programme. This finding is highly consistent with research, which highlights the need for engagement, which is both therapeutic and empathetic (Latta, 2003). The programme facilitator effectively and sensitively used her own experiences of family violence to encourage the development of an empathetic working relationship. Her approach was challenging but also respectful and non-judgmental. The programme gave families strategies and tools to effect change and to manage conflictual situations without violence.

The weekend workshops gave families the opportunity to build on their strengths. One of the stated highlights that emerged was the opportunities for families to participate in activities together, such as cooking and eating, and an exercise which enabled the children to work with their parents to create their vision of a happy/safe house. One person commented about their children:

... Didn't realise they had heard so much, I am ashamed, I should have protected them. I would say she [child] was quite affected. It would be just the shouting that would frighten her. She used to get frightened but now she walks in and says, "Stop". She will say that stuff she learned at the camp. She says it a lot (Couple 3, Interview, 2017).

Conclusions and Recommendations

There is a growing body of research which suggests that non-traditional models of intervention, such as couples counselling, can help address family violence. (Stith 2011). The programme is unique in both its methodology and approach, as it requires couples to work together in a group setting, placing the responsibility for change with the whānau, challenging behaviour and offering strategies for effective change.

Throughout the programme there is a consistent acknowledgement that family violence is unacceptable:

The courts should be helping families rather than separating them. We wanted the violence to stop not to be separated as a family.(Couple 5, interview 2017).

The programme has put me where I have always wanted to be with my family, my partner. For me it is one of the best things that has happened. (Couple 4, interview 2017).

To understand the dynamics of violence and coercive control there needs to be a paradigm shift to address the existing barriers to effective engagement. Te Manu Tu Tuia aims to address the impact of family violence and to reduce recidivism by introducing a more systemic, community based model, which focuses on strengths and not deficits. The objective of this evaluation was to document key positive aspects of the Te Manu Tu Tuia programme and collate outcomes and responses from families, staff and stakeholders to review the effectiveness of the programme delivery and to identify areas for future development.

Kaupapa Māori (Māori principles and approaches), such as Tikanga Māori cultural practices of Māori), were incorporated into the programme, enabling a better understanding of Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) and pathways to whānau ora that increase the wellbeing of individuals and their families. Throughout the programme, it is understood that a whānau-centric epistemology is used as a basis of knowledge and learning. All the participants stated that, during their involvement with the programme, their cultural beliefs and values had been understood and respected.

Each of the couples highlighted the use of effective engagement as a strength and an integral component of the programme. This finding is highly consistent with research, which highlights the need for engagement that is both therapeutic and empathetic (Latta, 2003).

Another strength of the programme highlighted by those interviewed was that the programme gave families the strategies and tools to change, to effectively manage conflictual situations and to encourage the development of skills to change whilst keeping the family intact.

Te Manu Tu Tuia has developed an alternative approach which recognises both the strengths of families as well as acknowledging the risks. The primary aim is to help couples embedded in family violence to work together to address the cycle of violence. Te Manu Tu Tuia promotes an innovative approach to challenging family violence. It provides an alternative type of intervention, which helps to achieve a sustainable reduction in family violence. An analysis of the data indicates that there has been a significant reduction in reoffending behaviour and subsequent police callouts; in relation to recorded incidents of violence there was an overall reduction in violence post-wānanga of 57%. However, when the preventative calls are

separated from the overall total the actual reduction in recorded incidents of violence is 69%.

These results clearly illustrate that the programme helps to improve the safety of families and create opportunities to interrupt intergenerational family violence.

These are initiatives that challenge a top-down approach to social change and promotes collaborative partnership that recognises sharing of power, knowledge and responsibilities among stakeholders. Being a collaborative relationship in its approach and emancipatory in its goals, this innovative programme demonstrates that social change through community development is possible. Placing couples and their families at the centre of the planning, implementation and evaluation of an initiative helps develop respectful and equal partnerships, which are key ingredients for continued sustainability.

Conclusion

Collaborative partnerships involving community members, community based organisations and state agencies offer viable, effective and sustainable initiatives for constructive social change. While collaborative partnerships are common intervention strategies employed by many community organisations, the programme presented in this paper is innovative in that it uses a couples-based approach. Findings from the study reveal that micro-level interventions involving couples and their family can bring about positive changes towards the prevention and reduction of domestic violence and enhanced general well-being of the family as clients are able to regain employment and generate income. Thus, this pioneering couples-based programme shows how the clients, the third sector and the state can build collaborative partnerships for social change. Evidence of significant reduction in domestic violence and recidivism suggests that similar initiatives are welcome approaches in community development for enduring social change.

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Ethics Approval

The Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT) Ethics Committee granted ethics approval for this study.

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