

# ‘Home-Grown, Feminist, Rights-Based Approach’ Proves Effective

Tonga

SHARE

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The Women and Children Crisis Center (WCCC) Tonga believes that there are two critical aspects of providing services to survivors of violence. Firstly, *fofola e fala kae fai ha talanoa*, which means giving the survivor the opportunity to tell her story in a safe environment. Secondly, ensuring that its counselling framework is survivor-centred at all levels of support, even when families and representatives of the village, church or community are involved.

These are just two of the ingredients that have enabled WCCC’s home-grown, feminist and rights-based approach, to reach and support clients effectively.

An independent evaluation of WCCC’s programs to end violence against women was carried out in May 2019. The evaluation found that to a large extent, the needs of beneficiaries had been met through WCCC’s preventative and responsive strategies.



(left to right) Soana Pongi, Racheal Fielea and Melemoala Makoni of the Women and Children’s Crisis Centre (WCCC) Tonga. Photo credit: Tara Chetty/Pacific Women Support Unit.

WCCC's approach is well regarded across multiple stakeholder groups, with activities relevant to the local context. It incorporates best practice strategies to support clients, including well-trained counsellor advocates, a 'one stop shop' model (an approach that provides prosecution, protection and services in one place) and community outreach program. More women are accessing services, demonstrating that WCCC has improved access to effective support for women and children experiencing violence in Tonga.

The centre also operates a male advocates program and plays an active role in Tonga's Ending Violence against Women Referral Network. Staff and stakeholders of the centre described the home-grown approach as being valuable in managing the risks associated with employing a feminist, rights-based model in Tonga.

WCCC's *Faguna* radio counselling program is another contributing factor. Accessible to all island groups in Tonga, *Faguna* radio program has proved an effective way to raise community awareness about violence against women and to reach women in crisis. 'I heard about the WCCC's services on their weekly *Fanguna* radio program,' shared one client, 'and I visited the centre to seek help.'



Soana Pongi. Photo credit: Tara Chetty/*Pacific Women Support Unit*.

The radio program also gives young women a forum to raise their concerns. Soana Pongi, a youth advocate with WCCC, explained: 'We always give them [young people] a platform to voice their thoughts and that's very new in Tonga, giving youth a voice to say what they think about politics, society [and the] church.'

The evaluation found multiple indications of ongoing benefits attributable to WCCC's program at the individual, community and institutional levels, relating to both prevention of, and response to, violence against women. Benefits to clients include changes in women's consciousness demonstrated by expressions of empowerment, self-worth and freedom from stigma and shame. Clients have improved access to resources including access to information, free legal services, child maintenance and a safe house shelter.

More detail can be found in in the full evaluation: <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/tonga-women-childrens-crisis-centre-program-summative-evaluation.aspx>

WCCC will continue to provide services that are accessible and user-friendly for clients, such as a helpline. One helpline operator, Falemaama Langi, noted that WCCC has been receiving more calls from rural and remote areas. 'People are starting to realise that there are people that they can turn to and they need to step out of their comfort zone and do something about violence!' she said.

WCCC's work is being funded by *Pacific Women* from July 2016–December 2019.