

The every day challenges for counsellors in the Republic of the Marshall Islands

Republic Of The Marshall Islands

SHARE

December 31, 2019

Five women in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) are making a difference by operating the country's first counselling service, *Weto in Mour*.

Weto in Mour is operated by Women United in the Marshall Islands (WUTMI), with the service and its staff supported by the Australian Government's Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (*Pacific Women*) program.

Some of RMI's most influential women have connections with WUTMI, including the country's President, Her Excellency Dr Hilda Heine, who was a founding member of the organisation.



Pictured: Candida Kaious. Photo credit: Amali Shaw/Pacific Women Support Unit

Candida Kaious is *Weto in Mour's* Program Coordinator. Counsellor-advocates Tanya Terry and Daniya Note provide ongoing psychosocial support via case management and case advocacy work for survivors of violence. Adelma Louis and Christy Mckay run a prevention program raising awareness in the community, schools, churches and government ministries on violence against women. These women – all in their thirties – balance work, family and other commitments with their passion to support women and children in a challenging environment.

Since opening in 2016, *Weto in Mour* has increased awareness of the issue of violence against women and improved the quality of response services and coordination of referral networks available to survivors.

Program Coordinator Ms Kaious, explained there are many challenges, not least of which is working on a sensitive issue within a small population, particularly in RMI's outer islands.

'Here on Majuro [the capital city] we say that we are related to everyone,' said Ms Kaious. 'But, in the outer islands, they are really close, like, "this is my house, this is my brother's house, that's my sister's house"... there is no person that is not related to the other.'

She added that communication is not easy either, with only one landline typically on each island.

'Almost every day there are people lining up waiting to use that phone... it's not private,' Ms Kaious noted.

Radio communication is another option, but anyone could tune in to the frequency.



Pictured: Tanya Terry. Photo credit: Amali Shaw/Pacific Women Support Unit

Ms Terry lost contact a few times with a client in Jaluit. 'But the case was still [open], because it was not yet over. I was trying to see if there were any assistance Weto in Mour would have provided,' Ms Terry said.

The staff also face attitudinal barriers in their work.

'As women in this profession and [as] an agent of change, we must be prepared to emotionally deal with society's negative attitude towards the work WUTMI and Weto in Mour is doing, to deal with comments like "we are trying to take away men's right[s]",' said Ms Note. 'Despite this, as a caseworker, we are dedicated to the work that we do to ensure that the victims of violence are safe and well.'

The staff at the centre believe that they can only change the community if they are passionate about the work they do, in order to inspire others.

'Just seeing these women being empowered and free; there's a wonderful feeling there,' said Ms Kaious. 'We feel proud of ourselves and the women as well.'