

Consultations to Meet the Needs of Women in RMI

Republic Of The Marshall Islands Ending Violence Against Women

November 25, 2016

Project name: Violence Against Women and Girls Support Service Project

Outcome area: Ending violence against women

Project partner: Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI)

Total funding: \$430,000*

Funding timeframe: 2014–2016

Pacific Women supported WUTMI to conduct far reaching consultations to ensure that the first support service for women and girls experiencing violence in the RMI will rightly respond to their clients' needs.



L-R: Police Commissioner George Lanwi with Ms Kathryn Relang, the Executive Director of Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI). WUTMI and the Marshall Islands Police Department have agreed on a joint working protocol, formalised in a Memorandum of Understanding between WUTMI and the police Domestic Violence Prevention Unit. Photo: Wean Elmer.

‘For many years we’ve pondered the idea of establishing such a service. When we talk to women, survivors or not, a place to go to for assistance is what they ask for.’

Those are the words of Ms Kathryn Relang, the Executive Director of WUTMI. She is proud that the organisation consulted widely in order to develop a model that will fit the needs of women in RMI.

Through Pacific Women funding, WUTMI was able to conduct community consultations with 222 people from six atolls, including through discussions with over 180 local women. Sixty percent of these women identified that they had experienced some form of gender-based violence.

The consultations enabled WUTMI to understand the type of service that women want. Women expressed a need for alternative, safe accommodation for survivors of violence; a focus on prevention of violence against women through community education and awareness raising regarding women’s rights as well as the laws surrounding violence against women; and intervention programs with men who choose to commit violence against women.

The challenge of accessing police support was a particular theme that emerged. To respond to this problem, WUTMI and the Marshall Islands Police Department have agreed to a joint working protocol to strengthen collaboration between the two organisations and improve survivors’ experience of reporting incidents of violence to the police. The program is also in the final stages of negotiating a similar agreement with the Majuro Local Government Police.

Significantly, the consultations also helped WUTMI identify the critical issues the service will need to address.

The facilitators of the consultations observed that, before participating in the workshops, the majority of women were unaware of what constitutes violence against women. Many saw it as normal or a natural way of life. For example, many women expressed shock and disbelief when they learned that wives are not obliged to have sex with their husbands and that men who coerce or force their partners to have sex are perpetrating sexual violence.

‘I didn’t know before that we have right to say no to our husband when we don’t [want] to have sex with them,’ explained one participant.

WUTMI will continue to use the information gathered through the consultations to design and deliver a service that fits the specific needs of women in RMI.

**This Story of Change was originally published in the [Pacific Women Annual Progress Report 2015-2016](#). All values are consisted with that reporting period. For the most up-to-date value of activities, visit our [interactive map](#).*