

Case study: Vanuatu Women's Centre works in partnership with the police to EVAW

Vanuatu

SHARE

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Violence against women and children is widespread in Vanuatu with 60^[1] per cent of women experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their life time.

Through Pacific Women, Australia has provided \$800,000 to the Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC) to prevent violence against women through provision of safe-house costs, expansion of services and research on violence against women. Support is also provided to the Centre to work with the Division of Women's Affairs to implement and monitor the Family Protection Act.

Mrs Merylyn Tahy, VWC's Coordinator, has lead the Centre since 1994. Her efforts were recognised in 2009 when she was awarded the 'Women of Courage' award by the United States Government for her work on violence against women and children in Vanuatu^[2]. Mrs Tahy is also a member of Pacific Women's Advisory Board.

In addition to the national centre in Port Vila and three branches in different provinces, VWC's national network includes 37 active island-based committees against violence against women (CAVAWs). CAVAWs undertake community awareness and assist women and children living with violence in remote communities. Working with trained male advocates is also important for VWC. Male advocates include chiefs, police, health workers and church, youth and other community leaders.

Since 2014 the Centre has been providing training to the Vanuatu Police Force, including a number of senior officers. One of the key changes since the training is the increase in referrals from police officers to the VWC. Officers now recognise that action needs to be taken to prevent further violence and for justice to be served. Most importantly, many of the officers

recognised that violence against women is a crime and that mediation is not appropriate and not part of their job.

Following a case study which shows the changes that women have made to their lives due to the effective advocacy, counselling and support provided by VWC network members. Thirty-six-year-old Lavinia^[3] was married with three children and had been facing physical violence for about 18 months before she made the decision to go the Torba Counselling Centre. She was encouraged to do this by a family member. Through counselling, Lavinia learned more about her rights and decided to leave the violent relationship. It took her some months to make this courageous step because she didn't have financial independence. She applied for a Family Protection Order (FPO)^[4], and was supported in this decision by her family who were able to give her financial assistance. When she felt strong after counselling and had the FPO, she began to earn an income from selling kava. She is now financially independent and living a life free from violence.

^[1] Vanuatu National Survey on Women's Lives and Family Relationships (2011).

^[2] Radio Australia interview (2013), [Vanuatu women's group gets financial from Australia](#).

^[3] Lavenia's name has been changed for safety and security reasons.

^[4] Family Protection Order, issued under the Vanuatu's Family Protection Act.