

Another successful telephone counselling exchange wraps up

Regional Solomon Islands Tonga Vanuatu

SHARE

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Counsellor and caseworker participants of the exchange.

‘There was development of knowledge, skills and experiences shared from different crisis centres on how to improve counselling through the telephone,’ shared a participant of the recent online telephone counselling exchange.

The exchange was convened by the *Pacific Women* Support Unit, in collaboration with the Australian High Commissions in Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, for counsellors and caseworkers in November. Participants were from the Vanuatu Women’s Centre, Solomon Islands’ Christian Care Centre (CCC) and the Family Support Centre, Tonga National

Centre for Women and Children (TNCWC) and Tonga Women and Children Crisis Centre (WCCC).

With travel restricted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic response, the Support Unit facilitated the online exchange, providing an opportunity for peer learning and additional support to the five partners during this period of crisis.

The exchange sought to build on the counsellors and caseworkers existing knowledge and skills to provide safe and quality counselling to survivors of violence, including remote crisis support.

Counsellor and caseworker participants agreed the skills needed for phone counselling are different to face-to-face counselling, with the exchange enabling further development of those unique skills for their organisation's COVID-19 response.

Telephone counselling is a more accessible service in the COVID-19 context, where emergency lockdowns, curfews and state of emergencies have restricted face-to-face provision of services. The first COVID-19 cases in Vanuatu were announced during the first days of the training – making the skills particularly relevant to Vanuatu Women's Centre's counsellors and caseworkers.

Sessions focused on peer-to-peer learning, sharing experiences and counselling practices from different contexts and conducting risk assessment at the beginning of the phone counselling with survivors of violence. The participants shared that the training strengthened their understanding of how to be more inclusive and to better manage calls for people with disabilities – skills vital to expand services to meet the needs of diverse survivors.

This exchange builds on the successful completion of a pilot training program delivered to staff from crisis centres in the Northern Pacific sub-region earlier this year. Resources developed by *Pacific Women* for the six-week pilot were refined for the COVID-19 context and, building on existing Pacific expertise and knowledge, adapted for the more experienced centres in Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

'The counsellors from the Northern Pacific were very new to telephone counselling. However, the crises centres in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Tonga have been in existence and have provided telephone counselling for quite a while now. So, the training was also a learning experience of Hannah

and I, considering the expertise already present within these centres,' said Wilma Eileen, *Pacific Women* adviser and co-facilitator.

'We were excited to be able to draw on such a wealth of experience that these crisis centres already had in delivering telephone counselling services. They have been really proactive in setting up telephone counselling services in advance and in response to this COVID-19 pandemic,' added Hannah Jay, *Pacific Women* adviser and co-facilitator.

The learning exchange happened over three weeks in November 2020, for several hours each day, co-facilitated by: Wilma Eileen, *Pacific Women* Capacity Development Adviser: Gender-Based Violence (Federated States of Micronesia and Republic of Marshall Islands); and Hannah Jay, *Pacific Women* Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Adviser (Tonga).