

*We Don't*  
**Whisper**  
**Any**more

Ending violence against women in the North Pacific







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Photo: Candida Kairos of Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) with family and friends (credit: *Pacific Women*, Chewy Lin).

Cover photo: Daniya Note, Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) (credit: *Pacific Women*, Chewy Lin); Lestina Berdon, Chuuk Women's Council (CWC) in FSM (credit: *Pacific Women*, James Benito); Etita Teiabauri, Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre (credit: UN Women); Tomiko Maddison, WUTMI (credit: *Pacific Women*, Chewy Lin); Jayrene Engichy, CWC (credit: *Pacific Women*, James Benito).





Lestina Berdon, Eleanor Mori and other staff of Chuuk Women's Council and its *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center (TICC) regularly travel by boat to reach women and children in remote and outer island locations (credit: *Pacific Women*, James Benito).

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### 'We don't whisper anymore but speak out loud,' according to one woman's story, in the North Pacific.

This photo book shares the journeys of Pacific women's movements and leaders – over more than 40 years – who have struggled, lobbied, organised, stood in solidarity, supported each other and survivors of violence against women, and triumphed.

One of their key triumphs in the North Pacific is supporting three countries to establish their first crisis centres: in the Federated States of Micronesia the Chuuk Women's Council's *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center; the Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre; and the Women United Together Marshall Island's *Weto In Mour* (A Place of Life): Violence Against Women and Girls Support Service. Women who lead the crisis centres and women who are counsellors and case managers work tirelessly to serve survivors of violence and to challenge attitudes in families and communities, which keep women silent and normalise violence against women.

Read their Herstories in this photo book. These extraordinary Pacific women and their legacy of sustained struggle, courage, leadership and commitment is a crucial component contributing to the establishment and expansion of crisis and support services.

# Forewords



**Tara Chetty,**  
Co-lead Partnerships,  
*Pacific Women*

**Once a crisis centre is open, we need to all work together to ensure their doors never close.**

This is why we continue to listen to the needs of our emerging crisis centre partners and, guided by their leadership, to work with them to help facilitate service expansion, along with quality delivery of services through multi-country learning and training exchanges.

This approach supports our partners to share their challenges, ideas and solutions to deliver quality crisis and support services, especially during COVID-19, a time of increased violence against women in many countries.

Here in the Pacific, we are pleased to have supported three countries to have their first crisis centres.

This was enabled through technical and funding support from Australia through *Pacific Women* for Women United Together Marshall Island's *Weto in Mour*, Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre, and Chuuk Women's Council's *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center in the Federated States of Micronesia.

*Pacific Women* has supported 15 crisis centres in the Pacific since it began in 2012 and, as it closes in 2021, Australia will continue to support crisis centres through its new Pacific Women Lead program.



**Teretia Tokam**  
Director, Kiribati Women and  
Children Support Centre

**I want more women in Kiribati to be supported and able to stand up and speak about women's rights.**

I've been coordinator of Kiribati's only crisis and support centre since it launched in January 2018, but my journey to start the centre and to end violence against women and children has spanned two decades. It will likely last my whole lifetime.

I feel blessed to dedicate my life to this journey, and thank my family and those who support me.

Domestic violence is so deeply entrenched in our modern-day Kiribati villages and society that it's often regarded as normal, yet it's against the law and against a culture that promotes caring families. Our culture is about protection and shared roles and responsibilities, about men and women working together and respecting each other.

Shifting today's mindsets to reject violence will take time.

But steady gains are being made against this seemingly insurmountable task of advancing gender equality and reducing violence against Kiribati women and children.

I am proud to stand with my team at the forefront of this progress, alongside the many partners working together towards this common goal.



**Christina 'Kiki' Stinnett,**  
President, Chuuk Women's Council

**I believe all women should live a life free from all forms of violence and discrimination.**

To support this vision, it's essential to establish and promote women's support services and to ensure they are accessible for women survivors of violence. That is why Chuuk Women's Council dedicated so many years to opening the *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center. *Tongen Inepwineu* translates to 'Love of the Family'.

This is the first crisis centre in the Federated States of Micronesia, and an integral part of CWC's network of more than 60 women's organisations and over 1,000 women members in Chuuk State.

Together with our members and partners we will continue to work tirelessly to help and support Chuukese survivors of violence against women and children, while also advocating for improved human rights and gender equality.

We need to water and nurture the plants that our aunties, mothers and grandmothers planted and keep them safe and growing for future generations.

We say 'Kinisou Chapur', or thank you, to Australia and its *Pacific Women* team who have offered intense support for so many years; they are part of our team making this dream a reality.



**Daisy Alik-Momotaro**  
Executive Director, Women United  
Together Marshall Islands

**Surveys show an alarming one in three Marshallese women experience some form of abuse in their lifetime.**

Here in the Republic of Marshall Islands, or RMI, the rates of violence against women and children are unacceptable for a nation whose culture is built on peace, care and love for family and clan. We have a traditional culture with a matrilineal structure that has existed for centuries.

We want to help our nation return to its culture of peaceful families.

At WUTMI we are committed to working to end violence against women and children, and to ensure men who perpetrate violence and abuse are punished to the highest extent of the law.

We established RMI's first counselling service called *Weto in Mour* in 2016, supported by Australia through *Pacific Women*, and in 2021 worked with the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to expand to the island of Ebeye. Expanding our services is critical, as survivors of family violence in remote and island locations need support.

Our expansion this year to Ebeye Island sets a milestone in WUTMI's fight against sexual and other violence and harassment against Marshallese children, young adolescents and women of all ages.





The Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre (KWCSC) regularly hosts Gender Based Violence Counselling Training, with this participant being a Child Protection Officer attending a 'training of trainers' session (credit: *Pacific Women*, Victor Itaea).



## HERSTORY

### Christina 'Kiki' Stinnett

President, Chuuk Women's Council (CWC)

Christina 'Kiki' Stinnett started at Chuuk Women's Council assisting her mother, Shinobu M. Poll, who was one of the council's original founders and past president. Kiki became active in the council's outreach programs for women's education, non-communicable diseases and ending violence against women.<sup>1</sup>

At her mother's passing in 2010, Kiki was elected CWC President, and in 2011 she was honoured by the US State Department's 100 Women Initiative, an international exchange program for women leaders. 'We are just watering the plants that our aunties and mothers and grandmother planted and keeping them growing for future generations,' she says.<sup>2</sup>

Today, the CWC offers a range of programs and healthcare services to women and families on education, health, environmental conservation and the preservation of Chuuk

tradition. In March 2020, it launched the *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center (TICC) as the first crisis support centre for survivors of violence against women in the Federated States of Micronesia.

'They need to unload and have someone hear their stories that they are holding to themselves. [Until now] they did not have that safe space where someone will really listen and try to help them,' said Kiki of the women in Chuuk who access TICC support. Since 2018, Kiki has also overseen CWC's efforts to lobby for family law legislation to be passed by parliament, which would afford women and girls greater legal protection and rights in FSM and Chuuk.

'My goal is to encourage my staff and the women of Chuuk that they can do better, that they can have better lives in the islands [and] at the same time not lose our culture that gives us our identity.'

## Celebrating the achievements of women

This story celebrates the achievements of women helping women. It offers a glimpse into the decades of struggle, solidarity and action that led to the creation of three vital crisis support centres for women experiencing violence in the North Pacific. It highlights the visionary and tireless efforts of the women and organisations who brought them to life and continue to lead them forward.

By sharing their stories, these leaders and their supporters and stakeholders want you to know the lessons learned, their advice for other centres in countries where women face similar challenges, and what is required from donors, governments, and regional and national stakeholders to build on successes and continue to improve the lives of women who experience violence.

Crisis support centres now exist in Chuuk in the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, and Republic of the Marshall Islands. They offer refuge, emergency shelter, health, counselling, and referrals to justice, legal and financial support to survivors of violence, making a fundamental difference in women's, children's and families' lives. They also strive to change the attitudes and behaviours in families and communities that keep women silent and normalise violence against women.

Up to two-thirds of women in the North Pacific experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime.<sup>3</sup> This is slowly changing, as the crisis centres reach out further into communities, and build credibility, trust and women's confidence to seek help.<sup>4</sup>





Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) staff regularly provide education sessions for health, nutrition and other issues for women and children at local community centres, schools and villages (credit: Pacific Women, Chewy Lin).

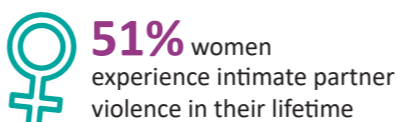
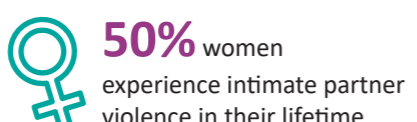
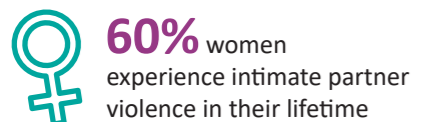
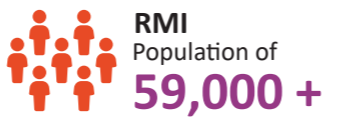
## Violence against women and girls

The prevalence of violence against women in the Pacific is among the highest globally. In three countries in the North Pacific: the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, women lacked access to crisis support and counselling services before 2016. These countries all share small population size, remoteness, and long distances between island groups.

Many men and women have accepted that violence against women is 'normal', and this is reinforced by the social and economic circumstances women experience. Access to services is also limited by the cost and distance of travel, and the challenges of obtaining services confidentially in villages and communities in small island states.

More than half of women who experience violence in Kiribati and RMI and over a third in FSM have not told anyone about the violence they experience. Less than two per cent of women reported violence to a formal service such as a crisis centre.<sup>5</sup>

### Prevalence rates of intimate partner violence



Data Sources: FSM – Government of FSM, DFAT and UNFPA. (2014), *FSM Family Health and Safety Study*. FSM Department of Health and Social Affairs, Pohnpei; Kiribati – Kiribati National Statistics Office. (2019), *Kiribati Social Development Indicator Survey 2018-19*. National Statistics Office; RMI – Government of Marshall Islands, WUTMI, RMI, *National Study on Family Health and Safety*. (2014) Ministry of International Affairs, Majuro.



### HERSTORY

## Daisy Alik-Momotaro

**Executive Director**, Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI), Republic of the Marshall Islands

Daisy Alik-Momotaro is a pioneer of the women's movement in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and a former senator in the RMI Parliament and Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs. She helped co-found Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) in 1987, alongside nine others, including former RMI President, Dr Hilda Heine, and Marie Maddison.

Daisy has spent decades working in community development, as well as advocating for the rights of women and young people in RMI, and to end violence against women and girls.<sup>6</sup> 'RMI's rates of violence against women

are unacceptable for a nation whose culture is built on peace, care and love for family and clan; a traditional structure that has existed for centuries, and a Christian country,' she said.<sup>7</sup>

Daisy was instrumental in lobbying individual parliamentarians for the Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act that passed in September 2011.<sup>8</sup> In her present role at WUTMI, Daisy and WUTMI director Marie Maddison provide mentoring support to the team of younger women running RMI's first counselling service, *Weto in Mour*.





Counsellors and support staff of the Kiribati Women and Children Centre include, from left, Etita Teiabauri, Tieua Iotebwa, Akoia Kietau, Ramaua Tebau, Abaiti lotua (credit: *Pacific Women*, Victor Itaea).



**HERSTORY**

**Teretia Tokam**

Director, Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre (KWCS)

Teretia Tokam has dedicated herself to working against the violence women experience in Kiribati, both to help women survivors and to change the system that allows the violence to occur. She has been the leader of the Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre since it launched in January 2018 as the first of its kind in Kiribati.

Working as a lawyer in the Attorney-General's office early in her career, she found her purpose. 'My turning point ... is when I did a domestic violence case in the Court of Appeal, appearing for the state. It was a brutal case: the woman was badly bashed up by her husband.'

Following that case, 'a number of women would come to see us, me and my lawyer friends, for help and it gave me the idea that perhaps I can do more for the women.'<sup>9</sup>

Teretia became a key advocate for ending violence against women in Kiribati, including within government and lobbying for the *Te Rau N Te Mwenga Act 2014* (Family Peace Act).

The centre has seen the number of reported domestic violence cases increase, and Teretia is under no illusions. 'Domestic violence is so deeply entrenched in our communities, it is seen as a normal part of Kiribati culture. Shifting those mindsets will take time,' she said, as she continues to advocate for women's human rights and ending gender-based violence in Kiribati.<sup>10</sup>

'I want more women like me to be able to stand up and speak about women's rights.'

**Enabling factors**

The following milestones are crucial contributors to laying the groundwork for the establishment of successful crisis centres.

- **Health and safety studies measuring prevalence of violence against women.** In the late 2000s, a series of health and safety studies were carried out throughout the Pacific using the World Health Organization (WHO) methodology. Many of the leaders of the crisis centres were involved in the studies. The resulting reports provided the first data that governments and Pacific activists had about the prevalence of violence against women. These studies were used by activists to lobby governments to improve and change legislation, and for donors to support services. The first one was conducted in Kiribati in 2008, followed by RMI and FSM in 2014.
- **Family violence legislation.** RMI was the first to implement domestic violence legislation in 2011, which was before the health and safety study. The Kiribati Family Peace Act was passed in 2014. In 2017, Pohnpei, another state in FSM passed its *Domestic Issues Act*. Work is currently underway for a Chuuk Domestic Violence Act.
- **Increasing donor commitments.** *Pacific Women* is one of the largest global commitments to gender equality. UN agencies, particularly UN Women, but also UNFPA and UNICEF have continued to increase their funding on ending violence against women (EVAW) in the region. Since 2018, the European Union (EU) and New Zealand have also increased funding for EVAW. This funding focuses on the prevention of violence, and improving data and coordination between referral partners.



## How change is happening

In less than five years, the crisis centres for women in the North Pacific have achieved many outcomes that are making a difference for their communities, and their contribution continues to grow.

These crisis centres have:

### 1. Reached vulnerable women in remote communities.

To reach vulnerable women in remote communities, the centres focus on telephone counselling, creating a volunteer presence in outer communities, and KWCSO and *Weto in Mour* have started new centres in outer islands.

### 2. Increased capacity of counsellors and quality delivery of services.

*'We have seen Weto in Mour staff gain more knowledge and understanding of the work and issues we are trying to prevent. More empowered and confident in doing what they do – assisting women and girls. For the other WUTMI staff, the training we conducted with the help of GBV Adviser, they have gained more knowledge.'* – Staff, *Weto in Mour*.

### 3. Increased technical capacity and solidarity through peer learning exchanges.

*'I want to recognise those that have helped in creation of Tongen Inepwineu Counseling Center – especially our partner and sister from Kiribati, Teretia who Pacific Women contracted to come to Chuuk to share her experience on how she established KWCSO. We were able to mimic and follow her example to start TICC. ...With her help and Pacific Women, we rely on each other's ability, support, and help. I love to ask people to help because I'm limited in my capacity, and I know things can only improve through learning. So I'm passionate to reach out and take advantage of resources and one resource I have is Pacific Women and KWCSO through Teretia. Thank you Teretia.'* – Christina 'Kiki' Stinnett, CWC President.

### 4. Strengthened coordination and partnership with referral networks.

*'We rely on them a lot. Especially in RMI [where] there is no government social services available. Once we are done with the health/medical service, most of the time, we open the door and let them go – but now it is a connection with WUTMI.'* – Referral Partner, Republic of the Marshall Islands.

*'KWCSO have built alliances with the police, judiciary, Office of the Attorney-General and other government bodies for cases that are high risk and serious.'* – Stakeholder, Kiribati.

### 5. Strengthened organisational capacity.

To provide services and fulfill their role as catalysts for gender equality across the North Pacific, there is a need for ongoing strengthening of organisational capacity.



## HERSTORY

### Shamima Ali

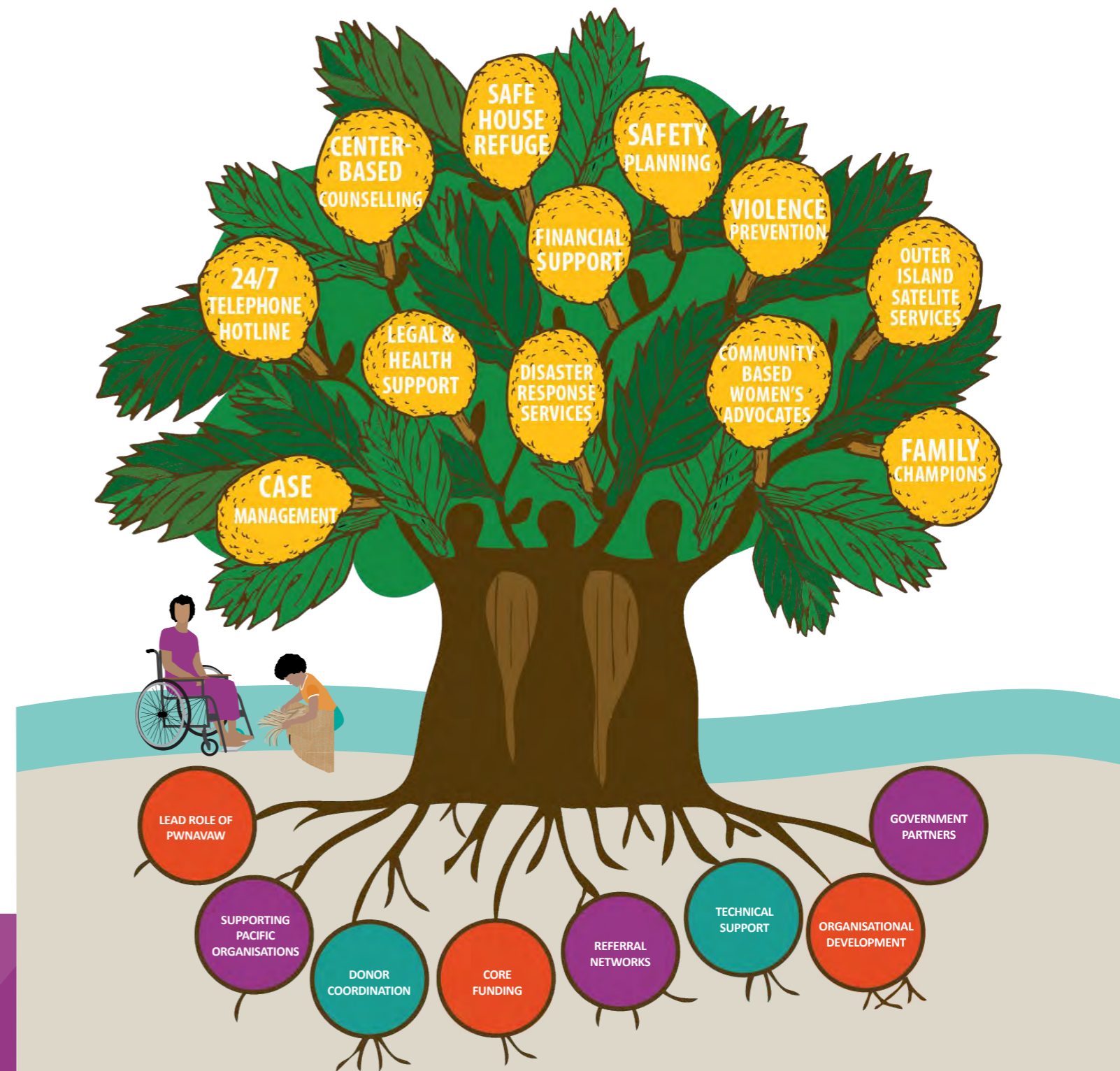
Coordinator, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre

For close to four decades, Shamima Ali has worked tirelessly to improve Pacific women's standing and rights. Her work and commitment to human rights have also earned her widespread attention and praise from women's rights activists and organisations around the world.

Shamima was shaped by her own experiences of growing up in a home where violence was the norm. After time overseas learning from other women, she joined the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) as Coordinator soon after it was established in 1984. Today, the centre offers crisis counselling and legal, medical and other practical support services to women and children. 'Half of our work is to provide direct services for the women. This is at the heart of what we do. The other 50 per cent focuses on change. This working is organising, lobbying, training, community awareness, research and publications,' she said.<sup>11</sup>

In 1992, FWCC helped found the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women and took a lead role in enhancing women's rights in other Pacific nations, developing and conducting training on gender-based violence awareness, prevention and response strategies, helping set up centres and providing technical support.

*'What I celebrate the most is that when we started in 1984, going through the early 90s, violence against women was a very low priority. No one recognised it. There was a huge struggle for funding, and it wasn't recognised as a human rights violation, not recognised as a development issue and so on. So the fact that over three decades later, it's almost on everyone's agenda... The biggest change is the fact that we can address it, respond to it and we can still keep up the advocacy despite the odds that have been presented.'*



## The symbolic breadfruit tree

The bountiful breadfruit tree is a symbol of hope and survival in the North Pacific. It represents the journeys of change undertaken by Pacific women's movements to establish, grow and expand North Pacific crisis centres to protect and support women experiencing domestic and intimate partner violence.

**Strong roots are the foundation.** They represent more than 40 years of Pacific women's solidarity and collaboration to end men's violence against women. They include the research and evidence of the scale and scope of violence that prepared the groundwork to introduce legislation and policy to criminalise violence against women. They also depict the donor funding, technical support, government partnerships, and peer learning and exchange.

**The trunk holds the tree firm and stable.** It represents the strength of the courageous women who lead the crisis centres and the counsellors who support survivors.

**The large, protective leaves represent the crisis centre services.** These continue to grow and expand to reach further and offer new services to provide support for survivors of violence against women.



# Timeline for crisis centres

**1992**

**Fiji/Regional**

Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women (PWNAVAW) is formed

**1993**

**Chuuk**

CWAC renamed Chuuk Women's Council (CWC)

**1995**

**Fiji/Regional**

FWCC starts Regional Training Program

**1984**

**Fiji/Regional**

Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) established

**RMI**

Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) established

**Chuuk**

Chuuk Women's Advisory Council (CWAC) established

**Key**

- **Fiji/Regional**
- **Chuuk**
- **RMI**
- **Kiribati**

**2006**

**RMI**

RMI ratified Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

**2010**

**Kiribati**

Kiribati Family Health and Safety Study

**2011**

**RMI**

Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act 2011

**2004**

**Kiribati**

Kiribati ratified Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

**2003**

**Chuuk**

FSM ratified Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

**2014**

**Kiribati**

Te Rau N Te Mwenga Act 2014 (Family Peace Act)

**RMI**

National Study on Family Health and Safety

**Chuuk**

Family Health and Safety Study  
Age of consent change

**2013**

**Fiji/Regional**

Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development commences

**2012**

**Fiji/Regional**

Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration

**2016**

**Kiribati**

KWCSC commences operation under the auspices of KFHA

**2017**

**Fiji/Regional**

Review of Counselling Services in the Pacific

**RMI**

WUTMI opens *Weto in Mour*

**Chuuk**

Pohnpei State FSM Domestic Issues Act 2017

Assessment of EAW Services and Gaps in Services – FSM National Report

**2018**

**Fiji/Regional**

Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women: EU, UN Women, Australian Aid, New Zealand Aid

**Kiribati**

Kiribati Social Development Indicator Survey (including prevalence of violence against women)

**Chuuk**

Lobbying started for the Chuuk Family Protection Act (in the pipeline)

**2019**

**Kiribati**

KWCSC becomes an independent NGO

**2020**

**Fiji/Regional**

Spotlight Initiative (EU and UN partnership)

**Chuuk**

*Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center opens in Chuuk

**2021**

**Fiji/Regional**

KWCSC opens a centre on Kiritimati Island

**Chuuk**

*Weto in Mour* opens a branch in Ebeye

## Recently opened crisis centres



### **Weto in Mour (A Place of Life): Violence Against Women and Girls Support Service**

Women United Together Marshall Islands, Majuro and Ebeye, Republic of the Marshall Islands

*Weto in Mour* (WiM) opened as the first specialist service responding to violence against women in RMI in 2016, operated by Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI), and supported by its ongoing partners including *Pacific Women*, FWCC and PWNAVAW. The centre extended its services in 2020 with a 24/7 telephone counselling line, and in 2021 opened its first outer island office on Ebeye, with support from EU-UN Spotlight Initiative via UN Women.



### **Tongen Inepwineu (Love of the Family) Counseling Center**

Chuuk Women's Council, Weno Island, Chuuk State, Federated States of Micronesia

*Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center (TICC) opened in 2020 as the first crisis centre in the Federated States of Micronesia, operated by Chuuk Women's Council and its network of 60+ women's organisations and 1,000+ women members in Chuuk State. TICC has provided counselling and support to women survivors of violence, including a 24/7 counselling line, since funding and technical support from *Pacific Women* began in 2019. This continued support enables TICC to keep expanding its advocacy, and training and mentoring services.



### **Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre**

Tarawa and Kiritimati Island, Kiribati

Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre (KWCSC) is the only crisis and support centre in Kiribati. Independent since 2019, it was set up in 2018 by Kiribati Family Health Association (KFHA), and expanded to open a new centre on Kiritimati Island in 2021. KWCSC continues to expand its services in outreach and referral, while further upskilling staff in counselling and case management for clients, with strong donor support and technical support, coaching and mentoring from FWCC and PWNAVAW, and also *Pacific Women* and UN Women.





**HERSTORY**

**Kathryn Relang**

Former Executive Director, Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI)

When Kathryn Relang first joined Women United Together Marshall Islands on a project to end violence against women, her awareness of the situation for women and girls in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) was limited, but she thought ‘What if I was experiencing violence and had nobody to turn to?’<sup>12</sup> Her commitment and passion for women’s rights quickly grew and several years later she became Executive Director of WUTMI.

In 2011, after decades of lobbying by WUTMI and other women’s organisations, the RMI Government passed *Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act* in 2011. Kathryn believes more education is needed on how to implement the law. ‘There’s a lot of people, including people in law enforcement, that aren’t aware of the

legislation and their roles and responsibilities around these laws,’ she said. ‘There’s also a cultural element,’ she added: ‘We have a non-confrontational culture in the Marshall Islands. So, when violence does occur, it’s often not reported. There’s a lot of fear and backlash from the community if it is, especially from officials if the situation involves a relative or someone of a high level.’<sup>13</sup>

WUTMI’s work led to the establishment of *Weto In Mour* (A Place of Life): Violence Against Women and Girls Support Service.

Kathryn joined the Pacific Community (SPC) Human Rights and Social Development Division as Country Focal Officer for RMI, but continues to provide support to WUTMI and other RMI stakeholders on ending violence against women.



**HERSTORY**

**Hilda C. Heine**

Senator, Republic of the Marshall Islands

Dr Hilda Heine was the first woman to serve as President of Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and also the first woman to lead an independent Pacific island nation. She is now Senator for Aur Atoll in the RMI Parliament. Prior to becoming President, Dr Heine was the country’s Minister of Education, the only woman in parliament, following a long career as a distinguished educator.<sup>14</sup>

A strong advocate for women’s rights, Dr Heine was a founding member of Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) in 1987, and still acts as an adviser for WUTMI, which operates *Weto in Mour*, the first crisis service of its kind in RMI. During her time in office, Dr Heine’s government secured funding from Taiwan to start an empowerment fund for women to obtain loans and

start their own businesses. Reflecting on her vision for the future, Dr Heine said, ‘Many women who experience violence do not have income and choices. Education for choices for girls and empowerment of women are important aspects for women.’

Under Dr Heine’s leadership, the Pacific Women Leaders’ Coalition was formed in 2019, bringing together women leaders from across the Pacific to strategise on progressing gender equality in the region. Dr Heine is also a powerful advocate for climate action and for Pacific women being recognised as leaders in mitigating the effects of climate change. ‘We need to break more barriers in the workforce, in homes, in schools, in health to get women and girls to achieve their fullest potential,’ she said at the time of its establishment.<sup>15</sup>

Daniya Note, Tomiko Maddison and Cindy Wase of Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) board a boat to travel to women and girls outside the capital Majuro (credit: Pacific Women, Chewy Lin).





Women United Together Marshall Islands operates the *Weto in Mour* counselling and support service for women survivors of violence, with counselling and casework staff including Cindy Wase (credit: *Pacific Women*, Chewy Lin).



**HERSTORY**

**Eleanor Mori**

Coordinator, *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center (TICC)

A year into her job leading the first crisis support centre for women and girls in the Federated States of Micronesia, Eleanor Mori says work at *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center (TICC) in Chuuk is both challenging and eye-opening.

Seeing women and girls come into the centre after experiencing some form of abuse has fuelled her passion for the work. ‘No child should feel afraid at home,’ she said. ‘A home should be safe. A mother should feel safe. When she is healthy and strong, she can take care of the kids and they grow up to be healthy and strong. When there is no violence in the home that family grows.’

The establishment of TICC has created a safe space where Chuukese women feel they can finally speak up. ‘Our

women didn’t really like to talk about what goes on in their relationships and it has been a process to win their trust. Now, when they see TICC staff in their communities, they are more open and talk to us about anything.’

To aid in its work and support women in need of services, TICC has established a network of 35 family champions and plans to recruit more. Eleanor’s vision for TICC’s future also includes expanding telephone counselling and a dedicated space for greater client privacy, a daycare centre and a shelter. Eleanor explains that no shelters for survivors currently exist in FSM. ‘That’s why we need a safe house where mothers can go for the night and stay longer if they need to.’



**Crisis Centres and COVID-19**

Cases remain low, but border closures for the three countries in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have had significant impacts on economies and communities. These impacts are contributing to increases in domestic violence reported across the Pacific; global evidence shows that during a crisis, existing gender inequalities are magnified, with women having considerably less autonomy and mobility, leading to increases in men’s violence against women.<sup>16</sup>

To respond to restrictions on movement and gatherings put in place to prevent an outbreak, two crisis centres introduced new telephone counselling services. This enabled women who could not physically visit the centres during movement restrictions to still access services.

Ongoing advocacy by the TICC, WUTMI and KWCSO has resulted in response services for gender-based violence being deemed essential services in the three countries throughout the pandemic. To assist during COVID-19 lockdowns, two crisis centres worked with *Pacific Women* to produce a local language ‘Staying Safe at Home’ video animation to help women stay safe during lockdown periods, and as a call to action for communities to support women and families experiencing violence.

COVID-19 contributed to increased coordination with referral partners. This has led to further strengthening of referral networks and responses to survivors of violence against women.

All centres developed Standard Operating Procedures for safely providing services in the COVID-19 context. These included safety protocols during counselling, community outreach and a 24-hour counselling line for both TICC and WUTMI (KWCSO was already providing 24-hour counselling services before COVID-19).





Counsellor and caseworker, Lestina Berdon, during a session at the Tongen Inepwineu Counseling Center (TICC), operated by Chuuk Women's Council (credit: *Pacific Women*, James Benito).

# COUNSELLING CENTER

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## Lessons for the future

Based on almost 10 years of learning by *Pacific Women* and its partners, the future for crisis centres in the Pacific will depend on their continuing opportunities to secure support for:

- **Multi-year, reliable and flexible core funding for quality services, reach and access.** The right balance of core, stable and long-term funding, together with project-specific additional funding and capital investment, is needed for centres to continue providing and expanding quality services.
- **Coordinated and harmonised centre-led technical support.** Technical support must be regular, consistent, relevant and targeted based on the needs of the centre.
- **Organisational development for reliable and robust data collection.** Other areas that need continued support are governance, financial management, operations and monitoring, evaluation and learning.
- **Addressing gaps in services.** As more women become aware of the crisis centres and seek their services, the gaps in services become apparent. These gaps need to become the subject of planned new investments.
- **Expansion to outer islands.** Centres need to start small and gradually strengthen and grow the capacity with staff. In the long-term, this will make the services safe and more sustainable and ensure greater quality and consistency in the services provided across locations.



### HERSTORY

## Candida Kaious

Program Coordinator, *Weto in Mour*, Republic of the Marshall Islands

Candida Kaious joined *Weto in Mour* with four other women, all in their thirties, and together they helped launch in 2016 the country's very first counselling service for survivors of violence against women and girls. 'The more I learned about gender-based violence and gender inequality, and how our culture is one of the things contributing to them, the more I wanted to learn and give back to the community. That's what made me stick with this work.'

None of the women had prior knowledge about gender-based violence and the law so there was a steep learning curve and they were grateful to work alongside Marshall Islands women's rights pioneers through Women United Together Marshall Islands. They faced many challenges, including the widely-held belief that their work was somehow anti-culture, anti-religion and anti-men, stereotypes they continue to work hard to overcome. 'When the program was new, people were saying that we

were going against our men, that we are trying to destroy our culture and customs. That what we were doing went against the Bible. Through training, we've learned to provide appropriate culture-based responses.'

She and her fellow caseworkers use Marshallese sayings that translate to 'mothers as caretakers' and 'men's need to protect mothers', alongside contemporary readings of the Bible to make the case for greater equality between women and men. Candida has challenged her father, a pastor, and her husband who previously had traditional ideas about men and women's roles. Today, they're both proud and supportive of her work.

By leading a team of women her own age, she has acquired leadership skills. To young women leaders doing similar work in the region, Candida says it is worth sticking it out. 'This work takes a lot of time and learning but don't give up. Just seeing these women being empowered and free; there's a wonderful feeling there.'<sup>17</sup>





Health education for women and children and other community activities are supported by Women Women United Together Marshall Islands (credit: *Pacific Women*, Chewy Lin).

## Checklist for Funders: Things to prioritise when supporting crisis centres

This checklist will assist funders to prioritise the lessons learned and drivers of success that enable crisis centres to provide quality services, to enable expansion of their services, and to build a stronger and more skilled organisation.

- Reach vulnerable women in remote communities
- Build counsellors' skills through professional development
- Enable peer learning through exchanges between crisis centres and partners
- Build strong referral networks
- Work with government and in-country partners
- Secure core funding
- Support organisational development
- Strengthen donor coordination.

## *Pacific Women* and its Support Unit

*Pacific Women* connects more than 180 gender equality initiatives supported by the Australian Government and implemented by over 190 partners across 14 Pacific Island countries.

Over nearly 10 years, *Pacific Women* has reached an estimated 1.45 million Pacific women, men and children.<sup>18</sup> It is one of the largest global commitments to gender equality and, as it comes to a close in 2021, Australia will continue to provide support to gender equality through the new *Pacific Women Lead* program.

The Support Unit of *Pacific Women* provides technical support and opportunities for knowledge-sharing and collaborative events to a portfolio of partners. It has offices in Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

Through *Pacific Women*, Australia partners with governments, local and international non-government organisations (NGOs), the private sector, disabled people's organisations, coalitions and others to improve the political, economic and social opportunities of Pacific women, and to end violence against women and girls.

In support of the creation and ongoing operation of the three crisis centres in the North Pacific, the *Pacific Women* Support Unit has provided grant funding, technical support, training and organisational development, research, and support for events and strategies to share learning and practice.





Staff of CWC's Tongen Inepwineu Counseling Center (TICC) include Lestina Berdon, Eleanor Mori, Jayrene Engichy and Filomina Asor (credit: Pacific Women, James Benito).



## HERSTORY

### Marie Maddison

Adviser and Co-founder, Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI), Republic of the Marshall Islands

Marie Maddison has been a force for positive change in the Republic of the Marshall Islands since the 1970s, including as a co-founder and ongoing adviser for Women United Together Marshall Islands. When WUTMI opened its *Weto in Mour* crisis support service for women in 2016, she joined with her colleagues in celebrating this important step: 'Providing protection and spurring empowerment from within, outside, and around is the purpose of a complementary and supplementary violence against women project such as this one. We've been aspiring to a program like this for the women of the Marshall Islands for at least 10 years.'<sup>19</sup>

Marie has served her country in many leadership roles, including as Permanent Secretary of government departments such as social services, health, education and foreign affairs, and led the Public Service Commission. In all

of her roles, she has been an advocate for women's rights and their roles as the 'weavers of society'. She has also campaigned and negotiated at an international level for sustainability of the precious environmental ecosystems of RMI, and development that would benefit all Marshallese people. 'The question is always -- how to mobilise the community? To change attitudes you have to mobilise people beyond just awareness,' Marie says.<sup>20</sup>

Driving Marie's commitment has been the need to protect the values and rights of women through the traditional matrilineal land systems of the Marshall Islands. If these rights were overturned, then: 'The land is no longer a source of power or security for women, who leave their home island and live with the bread earner, at the mercy of a husband and family. We want to remind and promote the knowledge of the attributes of women in the Marshall Islands. ...Women weave the society and family unit.'

## Looking ahead


The future for crisis centres in the Pacific will depend on their continuing opportunities to secure support that includes the following:

- **Multi-year core funding** is needed to ensure continuity of safe, confidential, survivor-focused services for women experiencing violence. Funding will also need to focus on reducing access barriers for specific groups, such as women with disabilities and adolescent girls.
- **Ongoing technical capacity and organisational development** is an essential accompaniment to core funding, as issues of governance, including data management, are closely related to quality and reach of services. Coordinating technical support with PWNVAW and sharing learning between services will be important in this process.
- **Establishing safe houses** as part of referral pathways will help meet a current gap for support to women survivors of violence, and various challenges will need to be overcome to provide this service, particularly for women in remote and difficult to access areas.
- **Training of referral partners** and ongoing support for pathways will continue to improve their capacity and emphasis on providing holistic care and confidential and safe services, so women are not afraid to access them when they experience violence.

**'No child should feel afraid at home. A home should be safe. A mother should feel safe. When there is no violence in the home that family grows.'**

— Eleanor Mori, Chuuk State, FSM.





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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health. <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/changemakers/stinnett.html>

<sup>2</sup>The Rural Monitor, Rural Health Information Hub (2016). <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/changemakers/stinnett.html>

<sup>3</sup>Refer to North Pacific data sources detailed on page 9.

<sup>4</sup>The urgent need for crisis services is clear from data showing up to 60 per cent of women in Kiribati have experienced sexual or physical violence from an intimate partner, as well as 50 per cent in Chuuk, FSM, and 51 per cent in RMI (refer to page 9).

<sup>5</sup>UN Women. (2021). Facts and figures: *Ending violence against women*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/factsand-figures>.

<sup>6</sup>Pacific Community. (2017). *70 Inspiring Pacific Women: Daisy Alik-Momotaro*. <https://www.spc.int/70-inspiring-pacific-women/daisy-alik-momotaro>.

<sup>7</sup>Media Release: WUTMI Training supports police in RMI to better respond to and prevent violence against women, RMI, 2021.

<sup>8</sup>Pacific Community. (2017). *70 Inspiring Pacific Women: Daisy Alik-Momotaro*. <https://www.spc.int/70-inspiring-pacific-women/daisy-alik-momotaro>.

<sup>9</sup>Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (24 November 2017). *News: Strong leadership for the new Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre*. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/news/Pages/strong-leadership-for-the-new-kiribati-women-and-children-support-centre>.

<sup>10</sup>UN Women Multi-Country Office Fiji, From Where I Stand - Teretia Tokam, September 2021 (2021). <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/09/fwis-i-really-want-to-support-women>

<sup>11</sup>Freedom Socialist Party. (2007). *Fijian feminist Shamima Ali: Moving beyond band-aid feminism*. <https://socialism.com/fsb-article/fijian-feminist-shamima-alimoving-beyond-band-aid-feminism/>

<sup>12</sup>The World Bank. (2018). *Breaking Barriers in Marshall Islands: Kathryn Relang*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/03/08/kathryn-relang>

<sup>13</sup>The World Bank. (2018). *Breaking Barriers in Marshall Islands: Kathryn Relang*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/03/08/kathryn-relang>

<sup>14</sup>Pacific Community (SPC), Her Excellency Dr Hilda C. Heine, President, Republic of the Marshall Islands. <https://www.spc.int/her-excellency-dr-hilda-c-heine>

<sup>15</sup>RNZ. (26 March 2019). *New coalition established for Pacific women leaders*. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/385577/new-coalition-established-for-pacific-women-leaders>

<sup>16</sup>Mahtani, S. (27 November 2020). Four areas of action to tackle the shadow pandemic of violence against women. *The Elders*. <https://theelders.org/news/four-areas-action-tackle-shadow-pandemic-violence-against-women>.

<sup>17</sup>Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development. (31 December 2019). *The every day challenges for counsellors in the Republic of the Marshall Islands*. <https://pacificwomen.org/news/the-every-day-challenges-for-counsellors-in-the-republic-of-the-marshall-islands/>.

<sup>18</sup>The estimate of 1.45 million Pacific people reached is an aggregate of data gathered across the program's four outcomes, relying on validity of data provided by partners and projects. Cumulative reach numbers to 30 June 2021 may include people that have been reached through more than one activity and accessing multiple services.

<sup>19</sup>Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development. (17 March 2016). *WUTMI opens Weto in Mour (A Place of Life)*. <https://pacificwomen.org/news/wutmiopensweto-in-mour-a-place-of-life/>

<sup>20</sup>Johnson, G. (10 March 2001). The woman mobilizing the Marshalls: Marie Maddison. *Pacific Islands Report*. <http://www.pireport.org/articles/2001/03/12/woman-mobilizing-marshalls-marie-maddison>.

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To read the full 'We Don't Whisper Anymore – Ending violence against women in the North Pacific' GBV 'story of change' booklet that accompanies this GBV photo book of Herstories, refer to: [www.pacificwomenreport.org](http://www.pacificwomenreport.org)

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