



Spotlight  
Initiative



REGIONAL WORKING  
GROUP ON THE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF  
FAMILY PROTECTION/  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
LEGISLATION



Pacific  
Community  
Communauté  
du Pacifique

# 2021 RWG Annual Meeting

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23 - 25 August 2021 (Cook Islands)

## Calling in Crisis: Adaptive Counselling Service in the North Pacific

### SPEAKERS:

- **Ms Sala Tupou:** Programs Unit Manager
- **Ms Tara Chetty:** Support Unit Partnerships Lead
- **Ms Sonali Owen:** Family Protection Adviser, FSM
- **Ms Wilma Eileen:** Gender Based Violence Adviser, FSM, RMI

### PACIFIC WOMEN SHAPING PACIFIC DEVELOPMENT:

Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (*Pacific Women*) was announced by the Australian Government at the Pacific Island Leaders' Forum meeting in August 2012. It commits up to A\$320 million over 10 years in the 14 Pacific Islands Forum members. The program aims to improve opportunities for the political, economic, and social advancement of Pacific women.

*Pacific Women* is one of the largest global commitments to gender equality connecting more than 170 gender equality initiatives funded by the Australian Government and implemented by over 160 partners across 14 Pacific Island countries. The current iteration of the program comes to an end this year, with a transition to Australia's new gender equality program in the region, Pacific Women Lead.

### OBJECTIVE OF THE PRESENTATION:

*Pacific Women* has been supporting partners who deliver services to survivors of gender-based violence, including both funding and technical advisory support. The program has worked with partners as they responded to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. For newly established services in the North Pacific, this meant quickly adapting to the shifting context and making their services more accessible for women and girls – including through the provision of remote counselling options, such as telephone counselling.

Advisers with *Pacific Women* designed a six-part telephone counselling training course to assist local women's services in the North Pacific adapt to telephone service delivery. In the wake of the pandemic, the health and social welfare sector around the region and globally has moved away from a face-to-face model of care to a telephone and online service. Considering the impact of COVID-19 in the Pacific region, being prepared and able to adapt quickly should it be necessary, will mean that women and children will be able to access much-needed support throughout any lockdowns.

This presentation shares the learnings from the telephone counselling training initiative. The initiative was informed by an urgent need to respond to survivors of domestic violence seeking counselling service in an unfamiliar landscape of covid-19 prevention measures, travel restrictions and social distancing.

Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) and Chuuk Women's Council (CWC) were co-partners in this adaptive approach. The FSM National Department of Health and Social Affairs also supported this initiative. This localization approach was the thread in which the partnership between the NGOs, National Governments, and the Support Unit, resulted in a quick uptake of the telephone counselling approach.

## BACKGROUND TO THE PRESENTATION TOPIC:

Providing telephone and online counselling and case management is similar in many ways to delivering face-to-face services, but there are also differences and unique challenges. The challenges and practical considerations of working over the phone – and perhaps also working from home – during a pandemic were discussed in the training and in the role-plays. The training also discussed how organisations can best respond and support staff to work in this modality emphasizing the importance of worker wellbeing and access to reflective supervision. The training material included a guidance note that can help organisations develop their own contextualised policies and procedures in this area.

WUTMI and CWC have crisis centre operations supported by *Pacific Women*, through funding and capacity building support. These organisations have benefited from networking and capacity development as members of the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women. This regional network of crisis center organizations is coordinated by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, the most experienced Centre which plays a vital role in training and the establishment of crisis centers in other parts of the Pacific.

For this presentation, we will draw on experiences from services for survivors of violence supported by *Pacific Women* in the North Pacific: **Weto in Mour** in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (established 2016); **Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre** (established 2018); and **Tongen Inepwinewu Counselling Centre** (established 2019) in Chuuk State, FSM.

## KEY MESSAGES:

- ▶ Whilst the primary focus of strengthening remote GBV services was to expand support to victim/survivors within a COVID context, an additional benefit is that a remote and 24-hour service will form an additional resource for first responders (under legislation) such as hospital workers and police as they look for ways to support people experiencing DV.
- ▶ Focusing on strengthening capacity of GBV counselling services is ultimately acknowledging the important role they play in legislative implementation once a bill is passed.
- ▶ Strengthening agency and supporting women's groups to form a community of practice through a common need for an adaptive approach to counselling had a compounding beneficial effect for both CWC and WUTMI
- ▶ A partner-led approach to identifying training needs, design and implementation contributed to a quick uptake by both crisis centers
- ▶ Both crisis centers were selected as essential services in the national network of Covid-19 respondents meaning they could continue providing face-to-face services and telephone counselling where needed
- ▶ Best practice and best fit based on women's lived experience inform ongoing training, including the Code of Practice standards
- ▶ Working the development/humanitarian nexus: telephone counselling is a counselling service option available to clients during stable and crisis times and is a necessary part of confidential counselling that is safe and convenient for clients.