

# Violence Prevention Project for Young Women Clients of Women's Refuge Evaluation Report

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Final Report

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**Women's Self Defence Network**  
**Wāhine Toa**



**WOMEN'S  
REFUGE**

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# Executive Summary

This report summarises key findings from an independent evaluation of the **Violence Prevention Project**. This project was a new initiative developed and run by the Women's Self Defence Network – Wāhine Toa (WSDN-WT) in collaboration with the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR). The piloting of this new programme was made possible through a grant provided by the Vodafone Foundation's Capacity Development funding.

The overall aims of the Violence Prevention Project were:

- to empower the young women involved
- to build the capacity of Women's Self Defence Network - Wāhine Toa to work effectively with these high needs young women
- to further strengthen the collaborative links between WSDN-WT and Women's Refuge (at national and local levels)

A total of four programmes were run between February and April 2013, split equally between Refuges in the North and South Island.<sup>1</sup> One of the four Refuges was a dedicated Māori Women's Refuge, the other three were general Women's Refuges. Each programme was between 8 and 10 hours long.

A mixed method evaluation was carried out that captured perspectives from three key groups: the programme participants (54 young women who were clients of Refuges), refuge workers from each of the pilot areas and the WSDN-WT instructors who ran the courses.

The key findings in relation to each of the Violence Prevention Programme's three aims are described below.

1. There was clear evidence that **the young women who participated on the programme had been empowered and learnt new skills and strategies to keep safer from violence and abuse.**

There were statistically significant improvements in participants' confidence in their ability to perform each of ten key programme objectives. The greatest gains were made in the areas self-identified by participants as being their greatest need:

- confidence in their ability to stop an attack
- to use physical strategies to keep themselves safe
- to use their voice to stay safe
- to make good choices to stay safe

These positive outcomes reported by participants were substantiated by the observations made both by the Women's Self Defence Network – Wāhine Toa (WSDN-WT) instructors of the courses as well as the Refuge workers who attended

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1 Three further courses at Refuges in the North Island were attempted, but did not eventuate for a range of reasons including that the Refuge didn't have enough women in the stipulated 17 – 24 age group, and difficulties with finding dates that worked for both the Refuge and the self defence teacher.

them. Their comments indicated the growth in the young women's confidence and self-esteem was clearly observable, endorsing their own views as to how positive and empowering they found this course.

Increases in participants' confidence that they are able to recognise abuse, identify risky situations, make good choices to stay safe and use self-defence strategies, together with increased likelihood of disclosing abuse and seeking help and support, suggest the programme is effective in increasing the likelihood of preventing and/or ensuring early intervention to stop the re-victimisation of these young women in the future.

2. WSDN-WT instructors believed **their capacity to work effectively with high risk young women had improved as a result of this programme.**

Instructors developed skills and awareness that enabled them:

- to understand and respond appropriately to issues relevant to a 'high needs' group
- to pace course content appropriately and remain responsive to course participants' needs

3. The Violence Prevention Programme has enabled **the strengthening of collaborative links between WSDN-WT and Women's Refuge (at national and local levels).**

The experience enhanced the awareness and understanding each had of the other's role and highlighted the benefits arising from being able to work together.

- Refuge workers spoke of a new appreciation and understanding of the role and value of self defence.
- a strong desire for future collaboration was evident, with facilitation of future courses likely to benefit from the now established relationship.
- links at the national level were strengthened with a clear and focused relationship between the WSDN-WT and key personnel at Women's Refuge National Office.

New Zealand's damning statistics showing high levels of violence against girls and women bring an urgency to promoting ventures such as this. It is important those most in need receive the support to stay safe. **This evaluation has shown it is possible to reach a group identified as particularly high risk and teach them skills and strategies to keep them safer from violence and abuse.** There was clear motivation from both Refuge and WSDN-WT to build on the now established relationship and offer more courses not only in these areas, where demand continues for other girls and women to have the opportunity to do the course, but also to extend this opportunity throughout the country and to a wider age group. It is likely such programmes can have positive benefits to not only the women who attend but also to their future and/or current children who are also at significant risk of the negative impacts of violence and abuse. The major barrier to expanding this successful collaboration and facilitating more such courses is funding. There would also ideally be additional funding made available for top-up courses for those who have already completed the basic course in order to ensure the consolidation of initial learning.

# 1 Introduction

This report summarises key findings from an evaluation of the **Violence Prevention Project**. This project was a new initiative developed and run by the Women's Self Defence Network – Wāhine Toa (WSDN-WT) in collaboration with the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR). The report has been prepared by two independent researchers Dr Elaine Mossman (Independent research consultant) and Associate Professor Jan Jordan (Victoria University of Wellington).

## 1.1 Background

WSDN-WT is a nationwide network of specialist trained accredited women teachers of self defence that has been in operation for 25 years. Their work aims to prevent or ensure early intervention to stop violence and abuse against women and girls. Their underpinning philosophy is that all women and girls have the right to live in safety from abuse and violence. Their instructors teach not just what constitutes abuse and violence, but also the vital strategies for how to recognise, prevent, intervene, de-escalate, get to safety, disclose, and seek support. They facilitate analysis of victim / abuser dynamics and how to change this. The focus of their work is to equip women and girls with options, strategies and skills to stay safe from violence and abuse. This includes building confidence and resilience as well as physical and practical skills.

While the original focus of WSDN-WT's work was with women, over the past 17 years the focus has shifted to school age girls (7-17 years) with currently almost 10,000 girls per year benefitting from their self-defence courses. Anecdotal accounts and research have demonstrated significant positive outcomes for these younger girls as a result of their participation in a WSDN-WT course. The current project represents a move to develop the capacity of WSDN-WT to work with a group identified as particularly high risk, young women who have been exposed to family violence (17-24 years).

The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR) is the umbrella organisation for about 50 independent women's refuges across New Zealand. Women's refuges provide specialist 24-hour support, advocacy and accommodation for women and their children who are experiencing domestic violence. It is a bicultural community organisation with services designed especially for children, young people, Māori women, Pasefika women and migrant and refugee women. They also assist lesbian women, older women and women with disabilities.

Combining the expertise of WSDN-WT and NCIWR enabled the development and delivery of this new self-defence programme that targeted young women who were at high risk of being re-victimised. These young women were a potentially hard to reach group, but identified as one of those most in need of violence prevention interventions. The piloting of this new programme was made possible through a grant provided by the Vodafone Foundation's Capacity Development funding.

The overall aims of the Violence Prevention Project were:

- to empower the young women involved

- to build the capacity of Women's Self Defence Network - Wāhine Toa to work effectively with these high needs young women
- to further strengthen the collaborative links between WSDN-WT and Women's Refuge (at national and local levels)

## 1.2 The Violence Prevention Project

The Violence Prevention Project involved self defence teachers working with young women who were recipients of services from Women's Refuges, teaching them skills and strategies for keeping safe from violence and abuse. While all these young women have been exposed to family violence which has resulted in their affiliation with Women's Refuge, their specific experiences can vary considerably. Hence, the programme was developed to be able to respond to individual needs of the young women including how to deal with verbal and/or emotional abuse as well as learning physical self-defence strategies (e.g. getting out of strangle-holds).

### Programme details

The content of the programme included:

- **Sexual violence awareness discussions**, e.g. 'victim' / 'attacker' dynamics, power and control issues, recognising and responding to early signs of potential violence.
- **Self-esteem and confidence building**, building the belief in participant's own abilities to deal effectively with situations of potential / actual risk of sexual violence.
- **Strategies to keep / get safe from sexual violence**, including cyber sexual violence (internet, texts, etc.)
- **Physical self defence skills and strategies**, e.g. strong voice, knowing vulnerable points, grab and strangle releases, defences from ground position, defences from weapon attacks etc.

Each programme was adapted to suit the individual needs, strengths and abilities of programme participants and was sufficiently flexible to address specific issues of sexual violence risk identified by participants.

A total of four programmes were run between February and April 2013, split equally between Refuges in the North and South Island.<sup>2</sup> One of the four Refuges was a dedicated Māori Women's Refuge, the other three were general Women's Refuges. Programme specifications included:

- **participants:** young women aged 17-24 years who were clients of Refuges

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<sup>2</sup> Three further courses at Refuges in the North Island were attempted, but did not eventuate for a range of reasons including that the Refuge didn't have enough women in the stipulated 17 – 24 age group, and difficulties with finding dates that worked for both the Refuge and the self defence teacher.

- **numbers:** a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 15 young women participants in each programme (with further flexibility in regards numbers at the discretion of the self defence teacher). A total of 54 women participated with 44 completing the full course.
- **duration:** each programme was 8 - 10 hours in duration, three courses were run over two days (2 x 4 hour sessions), and one course was spread over four weeks (4 x 2 hour weekly sessions). Flexibility in programme format enabled participant preference and local logistics to be catered for.
- **programme facilitators:** a specialist trained accredited WSDN-WT self defence instructor (one course was taught by two WSDN-WT instructors) with assistance from Refuge workers from each area. All of the self defence teachers involved were wāhine Māori. This was especially appropriate for the course at the Māori Women's Refuge.

The WSDN-WT had overall responsibility for the project including securing the necessary funding and development of the programme. The WSDN-WT self-defence teachers were responsible for delivering the programme and provision of teaching resources. Staff from the individual Women's Refuges were responsible for recruiting programme participants, finding an appropriate venue and arranging catering and other childcare and transport needs as required.<sup>3</sup> They were also responsible for ensuring appropriate consent issues were addressed in liaison with the self defence teacher and providing specialist domestic violence knowledge for the course.

### 1.3 Evaluation framework

An evaluation framework was developed by Dr Elaine Mossman and Associate Professor Jan Jordan in collaboration with WSDN-WT. This was then discussed and endorsed by NCIWR.

The framework aimed to evaluate the three overall project aims, specifically the extent to which:

- the young women who participated on the programme had been empowered and learnt skills and strategies to be safer from violence and abuse.
- the capacity of Women's Self Defence Network - Wāhine Toa to work effectively with high needs young women had been enhanced
- the collaborative links between WSDN-WT and Women's Refuge (at national and local levels) had been strengthened.

### Evaluation components

A mixed method evaluation framework was proposed that used both quantitative and qualitative methods to capture perspectives from three key groups.

- **Programme participants** completed pre- and post-programme evaluation forms to assess outcomes from the programme. This included ratings of their likelihood

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3 Necessary funding was provided through the Vodafone Foundation grant.

and/or confidence in their ability (i.e. self-efficacy) to complete ten programme objectives as listed below (see also Appendix A).

- stop an attack
- use physical strategies to stay safe
- use voice to stay safe
- make good choices to stay safe
- recognise risk
- understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships
- be in control of what happens to your body
- support others experiencing violence / abuse
- likelihood of telling someone
- likelihood of seeking help/support to stay safe

Participants also had the opportunity to write in their own words what they felt the most useful thing was that they had learnt from the course.

- **Refuge workers** were interviewed to seek their observations of the impact of the course on the participants. They were also asked whether their involvement with WSDN-WT through running the course had altered their perception of WSDN-WT and the value of self-defence work. The following questions were used to guide interviews:
  - how would you describe the impact of the programme overall?
  - what have you observed as the results of the course for the women who participated?
  - has participation in this course impacted on how you see Refuge's relationship with WSDN?
  - has it had any effect on how you view the value of self defence overall?
- **WSDN-WT instructors** were asked to comment on whether they felt their capacity to teach self-defence instructors to this high risk group had been enhanced along with over general views on the course and its outcomes. Instructors were invited to respond to the following questions:
  - do you have any comments in relation to your ability to teach a 'high needs' group?
  - how has your capacity / confidence in working with this sort of group changed?
  - did you learn anything in particular from instructing these courses?
  - how have your links with Refuge changed?
  - what did you see as being the main value of these courses?



## Analysis

A paired-sample t-test was used to assess changes in participants' pre and post ratings of self-efficacy. Qualitative data provided by participants and interview data obtained from Refuge workers and WSDN-WT instructors were subjected to a thematic analysis of key themes.

## Evaluation participants

- **Course Participants:** A total of 54 women from the Refuges attended one of the four pilot courses offered, of whom 44 completed the pre- and post-course evaluations. The majority of those attending were young women clients of the local Refuge, the target group for this particular project. Demand from older women clients, some of whom were the mothers of young women attending, resulted in broader age representation in some areas.
- **Refuge workers:** In each area at least two or more Refuge workers participated in the course alongside the women. Their roles within Refuge included managers, support workers, and Māori crisis advocates. One worker from each area was interviewed as part of this evaluation in order to obtain their perceptions of how the course impacted on their clients as well as on their own experiences of participating in this Refuge/WDSN collaboration.
- **WSDN instructors:** There were three WSDN instructors involved in course delivery, each of whom provided feedback regarding their perceptions of participating in these pilot courses. They were asked for feedback regarding their experiences of working with what could be termed a 'high needs' group of clients, as well as for comment regarding the collaborative experience.

## 2 Findings

This section of the report presents findings in relation to the achievement of the three core aims of the Violence Prevention Project which were:

- to empower the young women involved
- to build the capacity of Women's Self Defence Network - Wāhine Toa to work effectively with these high needs young women
- to further strengthen the collaborative links between WSDN-WT and Women's Refuge (at national and local levels)

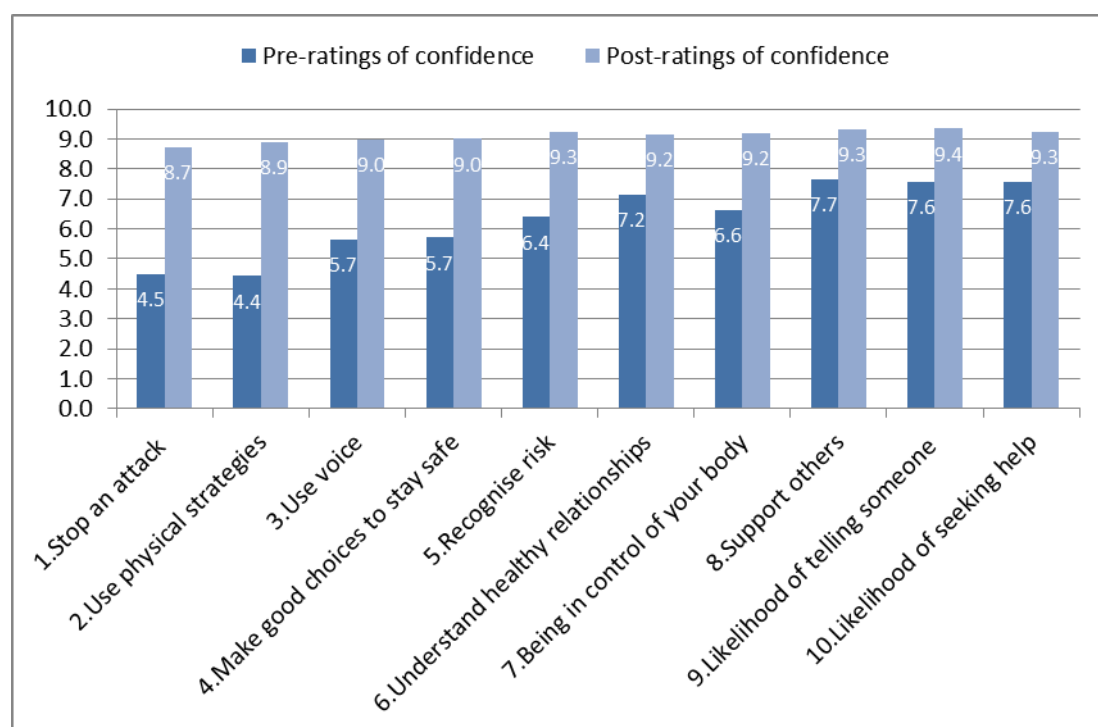
### 2.1 Empowerment of course participants

Objective one of the Violence Prevention Project was to:

- **Empower the young women who participated on the programme and teach them skills and strategies to keep safer from violence and abuse.**

This was primarily evaluated by looking at changes in participants' course related self-efficacy ratings from the beginning to the end of the course, along with two statements on their likelihood of seeking help/support to stay safe. A total 54 young women participated in one of four WSDN-WT programmes, of which 44 completed the programme and post-course evaluation. Their group means for pre- and post-self-efficacy in relation to ten of the programmes key objectives are presented in Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1: Changes in self-efficacy ratings following participation**



What can be clearly seen from this graph is that as a group, participants' self-efficacy and/or likelihood of completing each of the ten programme objectives increased following the programme. As a group, participants' lowest pre-course confidence was in relation to their ability to (1) stop an attack and (2) use physical strategies to keep themselves safe, followed by (3) using voice, and (4) making good choices to stay safe. Pre-programme ratings can be used as an indication of perceived need. As seen in Figure 2.1, these areas of self-identified greatest need, were also where the greatest gains were made.

Prior to the current programme, most or all of the course participants would have already attended a Women's Living Without Violence programme through Refuge. This could account for the relatively higher pre-programme ratings in relation to items 5 to 10 (more general violence prevention awareness strategies). The Violence Prevention Programme resulted in further improvements in these items, but also covered physical violence prevention strategies evaluated in items 1 to 4.

Table 2.1 shows that all ten self-rated improvements were statistically significant ( $t=5.3$  to  $14.8$ ;  $p<0.001$ , i.e. less than 1 in 1000 possibility these differences had occurred by chance). The mean pre-scores for all 10 questions for 44 participants who completed both was 6.3 out of 10 ( $SD=2.5$ ) with the mean post-score for the group was 9.1 out of 10 ( $SD=1.5$ ), again a statistically significant difference ( $t=13.3$ ;  $p<0.001$ ).

**Table 2.1: Pre-post-programme changes in participants self-efficacy**

Course objective	Pre-prog. Mean (SD)	Post-prog Mean (SD)	t	df	p
1. Stop an attack	4.5 (2.2)	8.7 (1.5)	14.0	43	.000
2. Use physical strategies to stay safe	4.4 (2.3)	8.9 (1.4)	14.8	43	.000
3. Use voice to stay safe	5.7 (2.9)	9.0 (1.7)	8.7	43	.000
4. Make good choices to stay safe	5.7 (2.4)	9.0 (1.5)	10.3	41	.000
5. Recognise risk	6.4 (2.1)	9.3 (1.1)	8.8	41	.000
6. Understand healthy relationships	7.2 (2.4)	9.2 (1.4)	6.3	42	.000
7. Being in control of your body	6.6 (2.9)	9.2 (1.6)	6.8	42	.000
8. Support others	7.7 (2.7)	9.3 (1.3)	5.3	43	.000
9. Likelihood of telling someone	7.6 (2.7)	9.4 (1.4)	5.5	43	.000
10. Likelihood of seeking help/ support	7.6 (2.8)	9.3 (1.6)	5.1	43	.000
Overall mean ratings	6.3 (2.5)	9.1(1.5)	13.3	40	.000

Table notes: Levene's test for equality of variances was not statistically significant so a t-score for 'equal variances' was used.

Research has demonstrated that increased self-efficacy results in increased likelihood of successful task completion.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the increases in participants' confidence that they are able to recognise abuse, identify risky situations, make good choices to stay safe and use self-defence strategies, together with increased likelihood of disclosing abuse and seeking help and support; can be interpreted as an increased likelihood that they will be able to prevent or ensure early intervention to stop violence and abuse in the future.

One instructor questioned the accuracy of some of the pre-programme evaluations:

*"I felt and knew that some of the younger women I worked with, often scored a much higher number in their pre-evaluation sheet than where they should have been. I guess for some they may have thought they were more confident & understood issues when they clearly were not that confident."*

It is not possible to verify this observation, but if true then the findings reported could be an underestimation of actual outcomes achieved.

### **Participants' comments**

Most of the feedback sought from course participants involved the completion of the pre- and post- course scales analysed above. The women were also asked one open-ended question to ascertain what they considered to be the most useful thing they gained from the course. Their comments reflected strong themes suggesting that this course increased their confidence and sense of their own power, providing them with tools to use to protect themselves.

Many said they felt **generally better equipped to protect themselves**, reflected in the following comments made regarding the most useful gain:

*"To protect myself and stay safe":*

*"To confidently defend myself if the situation ever arose."*

*"I have found that this course has helped me a lot, it has opened my eyes to a lot of ways to protect myself."*

This was clearly a significant realisation for some and indicated a critical shift in self-perception. It is important to remember that the women on these particular courses had all experienced significant levels of harm and victimisation, and many indicated in pre-course measures that they had felt unable to stop an attack. As Figure 2.1 illustrated, this was the area of biggest gain for the women. As one participant described it, the most important learning she gained from the course was:

*"That I have the ability to keep myself safe. I have the power!"*

As illustrated in this latter comment, for some this knowledge was linked to **feelings of empowerment**, with participants describing the most important thing learned as being "Women are powerful". The ability to act from a position of powerfulness was described by some as dependent on the ability to not be controlled by fear. Several

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4 Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Towards a unifying theory of behavioural change. Psychological review, 84, 191-215.

referred to the necessity of blocking their fear in order to be free to respond, as reflected in the following quote:

*"It doesn't matter what their size is, you can still defend yourself and that when you're getting attacked you have to block out your fear and just go hard."*

Another participant said that:

*"This knowledge and this course has helped to dissipate the fear that if I was attacked I wouldn't know what to do. Thank you so much!"*

Some of the women referred to **specific tools or techniques** they had learned about:

*"Tell and yell."*

*"Pens are weapons and deodorant cans. Hammer punch and keep DNA."*

*"That a pen is an awesome weapon hahaha!"*

*"fight to survive techniques – sensible, practical."*

Others alluded to an overall **growth in their self-confidence**, praising the instructors for "Giving us confidence and courage" and, as another observed, "Gaining confidence to be able to speak up!"

The same general refrain came through all the participants' comments and could be summed up in the following overview provided by one of the women:

*"Found it all fantastic information and advice and now makes me more confident should I be attacked."*

### **Refuge workers' comments**

The participants' comments regarding course benefits were endorsed strongly by the Refuge workers who attended the course with them.

The four Refuge workers who were interviewed all commented strongly that they saw indicators of greatly **increased confidence and empowerment** in the women attending the course. They described how the women coming on the course typically lacked a sense of power and control in their lives, coming from a place characterised by previously high levels of victimisation. One Refuge worker observed "a huge growth in their [the participants] confidence and self-esteem. A lot were scared and lived in fear and couldn't believe what they did on the course!"

The example was given of a mother and daughter who both took the course and how the daughter came to see her mother in a new light as a result of this experience. The daughter was used to seeing her mother in a victimised state, developing addiction issues as a means of coping. Doing the course together enabled this young woman to see a new confidence in her mother and a greatly increased sense of self-esteem. The Refuge worker commented it was powerful for her to see the growth of her mother's confidence prompting her to say:

*"Mum, you should hang around with women like this all the time! Not with the losers you normally hang out with!"*

Another Refuge worker spoke of how privileged she and the other workers felt being able to witness the transformations in participants' lives. The changes were evident **in the women's use of voice, posture, and how they held themselves in their bodies**. She said: "they were different when they left from how they arrived." For example, when asked to yell, to begin with the women made very little sound or noise – they were used to staying silent. What several workers observed was that:

*"By the end of it, they had a voice. They learned it was OK to yell and scream to get help or to scare off the attacker."*

One referred to the change obvious in a woman who had been living in a violent relationship for 13 years, saying how amazing it was to see her gaining strength and yelling, "Back off!" Before doing the course the women lived in fear and would never have felt able to tell men to back off – now they were able to even joke about it, saying "Any one comes for me, I'll kick him in the nuts!" While all the women laughed about this, nevertheless it was clear that their underlying attitude had changed and they no longer felt as powerless.

One worker said that even the day before she was interviewed she had seen, some months since the course, evidence of changed demeanour. She had been with one of the women from the course when they saw a man trying to break into a house. "She started screaming out words straight from the self defence course, and then her Māori girlfriend who'd been on the course joined her shouting "Back off! Knee him in the nuts!" The refuge worker was impressed with how loud and confident they sounded and suggested "We'll just call the police, eh!".

It was also recognised that self defence could be a useful way for **releasing feelings of rage and anger**. One Refuge worker said there were no anger management courses for women in their area and she noticed that "all that kicking and punching is good to release stress." After doing the course one woman gained the confidence to use the free gym on the local marae to go boxing. It was seen as constructive to encourage women to see the positive benefits from physical expression, "using it as a de-stressing tool – not for knocking and abusing people."

Those workers who had seen course participants more recently commented that the changes they witnessed on the course seemed to be lasting. One said: "they're all doing really well and that [the self defence course] has to be part of it."

The **lasting nature of the benefits** could be linked to the impact doing the course had on the women's relationships with each other. One worker referred to the tight whānau that emerged from the course, noting that the women use each other in their safety plans. For example, if there is an escalating family violence situation for one of the women and things are getting out of hand she will text one of the other women from the course and get them to take her away for a bit and give her a break.

### **Perceived positive aspects of the course**

In addition to observing changes in the participants, Refuge workers also commented on what they liked about the course. The Refuge workers commented that a lot of the women were surprised it was **a woman instructing the programme** – one said "I didn't know women could do this stuff, let alone Māori women." It helped that the instructor was also Māori – "she was tiny yet so powerful, and it changed their view to

see what this little Māori wāhine could do.” This helped the women see how much it was **technique, not physical size** or strength that was important.

Some of the Refuge workers spoke of the importance of the **self defence instructor being aware and sensitive to the needs of group members**. All comments received on this aspect indicated they felt such awareness was apparent in the instructors involved. For example, one noted that the instructor was very sensitive because she knew the participants had been in violent situations and relationships, and made sure she let them all know they did not have to do anything they did not want to. “She made it so easy that they all pretty much did everything.” The thing a few found the hardest was the strangle hold, being held from the back and strangled – the instructor said they didn’t have to do it but, the worker said, in the end they all did.

Also praised were the **range of different scenarios the instructors presented** to the women, and in particular the efforts they went to in order to understand precisely what scenarios women on the course had experienced and/or were fearful of encountering. Many of the women felt they were too small, weak or afraid to be able to resist an attacker, unless armed with a weapon. A Refuge worker commented:

*“A lot of the women who had been violent themselves and used weapons to protect themselves had their beliefs challenged especially when the tutor showed them what a pen could do. One of the women, instead of having a baseball bat beside her bed, now has a pen there.”*

This realisation helps to keep the women safer also, she said, since any weapon they had could be used against them.

The comment was also made that one of the last moves the women learned was how to respond if faced with a sexual attack and a lot were quite scared but:

*“they got down and did it and learned what they could do and wow, they thought, we could actually do this!”*

Another way group safety was enhanced was by ensuring the course was **taught in a place where the women would feel comfortable**. One worker said:

*“The women all live in a lot of grief and negativity and have big respect for the marae, it’s a safe place, so the placement of the course there was really good.”*

Also observed were **the different ways younger women approached the course compared with older ones**. One Refuge worker said a couple of older women from the local safe house did the course who appreciated from their own experience how difficult it was to handle attack situations. In contrast the younger ones often started the course thinking they knew it all and would know what to do if they ended up in a bad situation. As the weeks went on they realised more and more that they didn’t always know what to do, or how they might handle it. Often they thought they would just fight back or run, and had no understanding of other possibilities, such as what might happen if they went into a freeze response. It was felt that it was good for them to learn and understand more about the range of different reactions and ways of managing violence.

## 2.2 Capacity development

Objective two of the Violence Prevention Project was to:

- **Build the capacity of Women's Self Defence Network - Wāhine Toa to work effectively with these high needs young women.**

The collaboration between WSDN-WT and Refuge was experienced positively by the instructors and seen as a relationship worth developing further despite the additional demands and need for flexibility required to run courses such as these. Working with women who had all experienced trauma and violence required being **carefully tuned in to their needs and the ability to pace and monitor course participation**. The observation was made that:

*"Issues come up all the time which may mean a change in direction or slowing down completely so everyone has time to express themselves, take a breath and recover before moving on."*

As a result of her involvement, one instructor mentioned explicitly the impact on her:

*"I feel I'm more empathetic and educated for having taught the Refuge course. I had to change the way I teach to accommodate the girls. Doing that has increased my personal teaching capabilities."*

The instructors gained a deeper awareness of the importance of **pacing course content** and remaining responsive to course participants' needs.

*"There was the need to spend time hearing their stories and to hear (and respond) to their fears around techniques not working i.e. when he is a 'P' user. As well, how to deal with him continuing to turn up at home as if he belonged there – all very real fears for very real situations."*

The instructors said they felt privileged to hear the stories of horrific abuse experienced by many of the women, including the younger ones on the course.

The three instructors all provided comments indicating that they gained significant learning from their involvement with the women from Refuge. They referred, for example, **to the need to be aware of the issues relevant to a 'high needs' group** such as this, noting the importance of allowing time to hear the stories of participants and provide advice and techniques that fitted with the violent scenarios they had experienced. It was important to validate for the women:

*"how hard it is to stand up to someone who fills you with fear... [and the] value in being relentless, both in their physical defence and in the on-going fight for freedom after separation."*

The participants' own often horrific histories of abuse and violence required sensitivity, but possibly also contributed to the zeal with which they embraced some self defence techniques. One instructor expressed it this way:

*"Something that came through first was their enthusiasm for the gory, body damaging stuff - lots of laughter around hurting, breaking bones / joints, bloody noses, biting off bits of lip, arm etc."*



This was confirmed also by the Refuge workers' observations of how much fun the girls and women had when encouraged to be loud and physical as they resisted attacks.

Also commented upon was the **importance of recognising the benefits of wider whānau involvement** in the courses, particularly in terms of enabling positive whānau support for young women who had experienced violence. They commented also on seeing multiple generations participating alongside each other – some courses had mothers and daughters attending while one had three generations present – “nanny, mum and girl. This was really powerful.”

One instructor commented that not only did teaching this course increase her teaching capacity and effectiveness but was useful also in the following way:

*“Keeping my feet firmly on the ground when considering the situations some girls and women live through every day of their lives.”*

### **Refuge workers perspectives**

Comments made by Refuge workers suggested that they also found the experience of participating in these courses capacity-building for their own organisation. Several said they felt their local group benefitted from the experience of doing this course with each other and the women. It also helped the women to get to know the Refuge workers better, making it easier when the workers were running other courses and trying to encourage women to participate. It also helped the women clients get to know each other better and in at least one area encouraged them to form a close, whānau support group.

## **2.3 Strengthen collaborative links**

Objective three of the Violence Prevention Project was to:

- **Further strengthen the collaborative links between WSDN-WT and Women's Refuge (at national and local levels)**

Both self defence instructors and Refuge workers alike commented on the positive nature of undertaking this collaborative exercise together. **The experience enhanced the awareness and understanding each had of the other's role and highlighted the benefits arising from being able to work together.** The Refuge workers felt they gained a new appreciation of how self defence training could benefit their client group and complement existing programmes and relationships. One observed that:

*“Refuge usually works with people as victims and self defence usually works with people not as victims”*

Implied this contributed to positive learning for both groups. She also noted how self defence training has typically been perceived as more focused on stranger danger whereas refuge sees how much of the violence is interpersonal. What she came to appreciate was how much overlap there was in reality, and how relevant the work of each could be to the other.

She and others noted that such benefits would be lost unless further opportunities existed to develop these relationships further. “We need now to continue building the relationship with them.”

Follow up from the course was important along with on-going support and some discussion was needed as to **‘where to’ next**. She felt it was important to have the Refuge workers participating alongside their client group on the self defence courses. They could then provide support for the women, and often knew where the areas of discomfort and sensitivity might be. It was also noted as being advantageous to the self defence instructors to have the workers available to provide background information on the group and the kinds of violence they had encountered. This helped to custom-make the course where appropriate, since it was seen as important for the instructors to be able to meet the group where they were at and at their developmental level also.

### **New understanding of the role and value of self defence**

Recognition was also given by the Refuge workers to the learning they gained regarding the role and value of self defence. One worker commented that she thought self defence is something often people think they know about but everyone on the course learned so much from it,

*“We learned the value of self defence.”*

Another worker reflected how strongly it reminded her of the need to embrace both the **psychological and physical** dimensions. She considered that probably Refuge had not focused as much on the physical as it should or could have, giving the example of how it was useful on the course to see what message is given when a woman walks round with her head down. She felt maybe Refuge have had more of a focus on what women can do legally to protect themselves, not so much on what to actually do in a violent situation. She also noted the importance of women learning the verbal side of things too, given that many are not raised to vocalise and so need encouragement and practice to do so.

### **Desire for future collaborations**

The Refuge workers all spoke of their desire to see this collaboration expand and continue. As one said, “now we have a relationship for the future” [between this Refuge and WSDN-WT]. She felt it would be great to ask the WSDN-WT women back to do more, and also find ways of integrating self defence into some of Refuge’s existing programmes. Now that a relationship has been established this should enable more to happen in future, she felt, if they could get the funding.

All the Refuge workers interviewed spoke of their desire to see future courses run, and sometimes referred to wanting to encourage their own daughters to attend such courses also. One noted, for instance, “I’d love all of our young women to be doing it, for it to be a class they all did at school.”

Having a new understanding of the value of self-defence, there was evidence Refuge workers would be in a better position to promote future courses. Some of the staff had not been looking forward to it, and had been a little anxious about it being this “big physical thing”. By the end of it they felt quite differently. One said,

*"I'd never been to self defence before, I've always thought I would be fine, now I definitely, definitely would do **all I could to get more women along.**"*

### **Strengthening collaborative links at the national level**

The Chairperson of WSDN-WT provided comments that indicated the Violence Prevention Project had facilitated stronger collaborative links at the national level in addition to the local level.

*We have had numerous national-level meetings between Women's Self Defence Network - Wāhine Toa and the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges during the 18 months duration of the (extended) project. In the first half of the project period there was a complete turnover of National Refuge personnel connected with this project, which necessitated establishing new relationships and starting the partnership anew. The final outcome was a clear and focused relationship with [a nominated person at head office] who took a lead role with all other Refuge personnel involved in the project.*

The collaboration on this project also resulted in WSDN-WT representatives being invited to the Women's Refuge National Conference in 2012, which further enhanced the connections.

### 3 Summary and conclusion

This report provides an overview of how the four pilot courses run by WSDN for women in refuge were experienced by all those involved. While there was relatively little opportunity to obtain feedback from course participants, the pre- and post-course evaluations are unambiguous in demonstrating the perceived benefits experienced by course participants. These indicators were substantiated by the observations made both by the WSDN instructors of these courses as well as the Refuge workers who attended them. The latter had prior knowledge of the participants and their histories and were thus well-positioned to observe how the course was impacting at the time, as well as witness for many of the women if the changes were sustained over time.

On every front the outcomes are extremely positive and favourable. It is apparent that participation in this course brought benefits to everyone involved. **The growth in the girls' and women's confidence and self-esteem was clearly observable, endorsing their own views as to how positive and empowering they found this course.** These increases in participants' confidence that they are able to recognise abuse, identify risky situations, make good choices to stay safe and use self-defence strategies, together with increased likelihood of disclosing abuse and seeking help and support, suggest the programme is effective in increasing the likelihood of preventing and/or ensuring early intervention to stop the re-victimisation of these young women in the future.

The Refuge and WSDN-WT workers involved were also overwhelmingly affirming of the benefits from this pilot collaborative project. Each learned more about the other and broadened their understanding of the mutual benefits to be gained from working together. The major barrier to expanding this collaboration and facilitating more such courses is funding. The need is clear for more courses to be offered not only in these areas, where demand continues for other girls and women to have the opportunity to do the course, but also to extend this opportunity throughout the country. There would also ideally be additional funding made available for top-up courses for those who have already completed the basic course in order to ensure the consolidation of initial learning.

From the comments made, clear indicators emerged of the ingredients they felt contributed to the overall success of the courses. These are summarised below:

Factors helping the effectiveness of the course:

**(i) Who it was taught by:**

- qualified and experienced WSDN instructors aware of the issues
- instructors whom the participants could relate to eg, women, Māori

**(ii) Where it was taught:**

- in a safe place, preferably already known/familiar with
- with women they already knew
- with support workers who knew them present, who could also provide background information for instructors

**(iii) What was taught:**

- realistic range of scenarios, preferably informed by course participants' own experiences and current fears.

**(iv) How it was taught:**

- sensitivity to specific needs and fears
- paced to allow time for story-telling and sharing
- tailoring course to women's own specific violent experiences and fears.

New Zealand's damning statistics showing high levels of violence against girls and women bring an urgency to this venture. Women need to know how to defend themselves both physically and psychologically in order to try to prevent injuries and possible fatalities, while those already victimised need to be supported to rebuild self esteem and confidence as a way of reducing the risks of repeat victimisation, addictions, retaliatory offending, and any other of the possible consequences that could result. Investment now in the social health, safety and well-being of our society may help to turn the tide of violence, and the expansion of this pilot programme to nation-wide delivery should ideally be accompanied by funding to undertake a more in-depth evaluation than was possible for the current pilot.

While all the women involved in these courses clearly benefited from the experience, it is imperative that steps are taken to ensure that the benefits are not confined to them alone. On the basis of the evidence presented here, it seems likely that other high risk groups of women from a wider age group would also benefit from being able to participate in self defence courses targeted specifically at their needs. The unanticipated experience of having multiple generations of women from the same family/whānau participating highlighted the necessity of recognising the intergenerational transmission of values and attitudes. Some of the examples given showed that attending this course with their mothers helped young women to see them in a new light, gaining the confidence to defend themselves, and this indicates the clear potential for WSDN-WT courses to impact positively in turn on how these young women will mother their own children. It is also likely the vulnerability of young children of mothers whose safety is at risk can be reduced if the mothers are empowered with self defence knowledge. The overall message supports the notion that access to self defence knowledge and training should be viewed as a universal right for women and girls while our crime statistics show they remain so clearly vulnerable to attack, violence, and control.

## **Appendix A: Participant evaluation forms**

# Vodafone Pilot of Young Women's Self Defence @ Women's Refuge

PRE-COURSE

## PARTICIPANT EVALUATION FORM

Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle your rating for each question

	Not at all confident		Not very confident		Somewhat confident		Confident			Very confident	
1. How confident are you in your ability to stop an attack?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. How confident are you in your ability to use your physical strategies to help stay safe?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. How confident are you in your ability to use your voice to help stay safe?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. How confident are you in your ability to make good choices to help stay safe?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5. How confident are you in your ability to recognise potentially unsafe situations?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. How confident are you in your ability to know the difference between healthy relationships and unhealthy (or harmful) relationships?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. How confident are you that you will always be the person in control of what happens to your body?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8. How confident are you in your ability to support other people you know who are experiencing violence / abuse?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Not at all likely		Not very likely		Somewhat likely		Likely			Very likely	
9. How likely are you to tell someone if you are on the receiving end of violence / abuse?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. How likely are you to seek help / support to stay safe?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

# Vodafone Pilot of Young Women's Self Defence @ Women's Refuge

POST-COURSE

## PARTICIPANT EVALUATION FORM

Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle your rating for each question

	Not at all confident		Not very confident		Somewhat confident		Confident		Very confident		
1. How confident are you in your ability to stop an attack?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. How confident are you in your ability to use your physical strategies to help stay safe?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. How confident are you in your ability to use your voice to help stay safe?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. How confident are you in your ability to make good choices to help stay safe?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5. How confident are you in your ability to recognise potentially unsafe situations?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. How confident are you in your ability to know the difference between healthy relationships and unhealthy (or harmful) relationships?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. How confident are you that you will always be the person in control of what happens to your body?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8. How confident are you in your ability to support other people you know who are experiencing violence / abuse?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Not at all likely		Not very likely		Somewhat likely		Likely		Very likely		
9. How likely are you to tell someone if you are on the receiving end of violence / abuse?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. How likely are you to seek help / support to stay safe?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**For end of course only:**

What's the most useful thing you've learned at this course?

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