

“**MEDIA ADVOCACY PROJECT**”

**PROJECT SUMMARY
SEPTEMBER 2010**





INTRODUCTION

The It's not OK media advocacy project aimed to change the way the New Zealand news media reports family violence.

It was clear when the Campaign began that its goal of changing community attitudes towards family violence could not be achieved without good quality and plentiful reporting in the news media.

We knew that the way the news media portrays family violence had a significant impact on the way New Zealanders think about the topic.

We knew that news reporting before the Campaign began did not show the seriousness or prevalence of family violence in New Zealand.

We also knew that myths about family violence were often unintentionally endorsed by news stories – simply because reporters did not understand the topic.

Our approach was to treat the news media as one of many audiences we needed to work with to achieve a shift in attitudes and behaviour towards family violence.

Our strategy was to work with all the audiences who could influence the quality and quantity of news stories across the print and broadcast media.

Work began in 2006, a year before the Campaign's mass media advertising component was launched.





DEVELOPING SPOKESPEOPLE

News stories are shaped by the sources reporters go to. In New Zealand in 2006 the number and quality of spokespeople on family violence was poor.

Community organisations working to prevent family violence rarely engaged with the media out of fear, lack of skills and ignorance of the contribution they could make.

They said:

- reporters twist my words
- they sensationalise the story
- I never ring them back
- I don't know what to say
- I had a bad experience so I don't talk to reporters now.

New Zealand's experts on family violence are the people working in community organisations, they deal with victims and perpetrators every day. They didn't see themselves as experts and didn't see the value of engaging with the news media.

We developed a media training workshop and delivered it free of charge round the country. A media manual was produced giving step by step practical information on the importance of being part of news stories and how to go about it in a safe way.

The workshop demystified the news media and showed participants how to get into the news on their own terms. Instead of feeling frustrated about the quality of news reporting, they could turn their energy to proactive media activity.

Feedback showed the workshop was effective:

I think it has given our family violence network the confidence to use the media in a positive, ongoing way to promote our aims and objectives around family violence.

I found the session extremely useful and will be a lot more confident when I have to deal with the media.

We offered media support following the workshop. Anyone who had participated in a workshop could get help writing media releases, talking over key messages prior to an interview and support for media strategies.

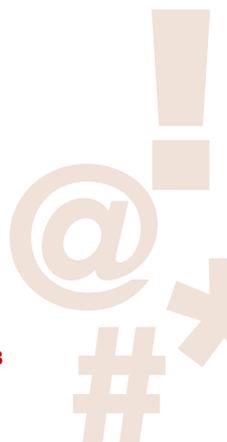
We developed a database of community spokespeople who could be alerted to news opportunities such as sentencing for a family violence murder, the release of crime statistics or new research. Good media releases can be shared with everyone on the database.

We offered training and support to national NGOs and helped them to develop effective media strategies and key messages to speak out about family violence in tune with their own kaupapa.

When the Campaign's television ads were launched in September 2007, the media was inundated with media releases about family violence and supporting the Campaign. Stories appeared across the country in national and provincial media.

This gave the Campaign a groundswell of community support and introduced the news media to a range of quality spokespeople.

Since September 2007 the quality and quantity of news stories on family violence has been sustained.





TRAINING FOR REPORTERS

In 2006 we developed a seminar for reporters. This was offered to the nine accredited journalism schools in New Zealand and newspaper newsrooms.

The 90 minute seminar gave reporters basic information on family violence – what it is, who is affected, latest statistics, the law and the dynamics of abusive relationships.

The seminar alerted reporters to common myths and stereotypes and illustrated best practice for reporting family violence incidents, using New Zealand examples of good and bad stories.

We realised that poor reporting was based on ignorance and once reporters had facts, particularly statistics, their stories vastly improved. They simply had not known how much violence happened in New Zealand families and how serious it was.

Historical attitudes that minimise domestic violence, treat it as a private matter rather than a crime and keep it hidden behind closed doors, pervade newsrooms just as they pervade other sectors of the community.

Uptake of the seminar was high from the journalism schools but not so high from newsrooms where the opportunities to get reporting staff together for an hour on the same day are few.

However the Guidelines for Reporters developed by the Campaign has been a popular download from the website so we know reporters do want them and do use them.

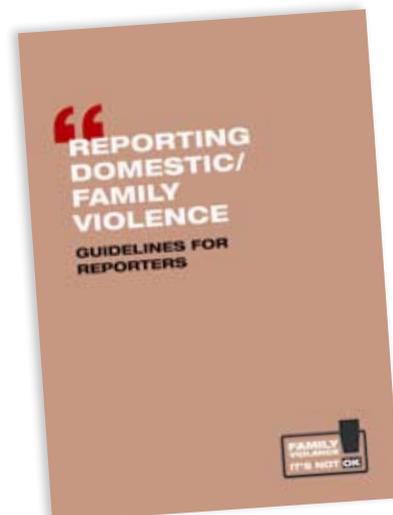
Feedback from the seminar was positive:

It was extremely useful. This is an issue that I would have been unsure how best to approach, now I feel much more confident that I could do a balanced story.

It opened my eyes to how crucial the media role is, particularly in family violence cases.

We also write to reporters and editors to congratulate them on high quality stories, and we alert news outlets to news stories and put them in touch with spokespeople whenever we can.

We visit editors whenever there is an opportunity to explain the media advocacy project and share the media audit results – and leave a copy of the guidelines for the newsroom.





MEDIA AUDITS

In 2007 we commissioned a media audit. Our information about the quantity and quality of news reporting on family violence up to this point was based on anecdotal evidence and overseas research.

We wanted hard evidence of news reporting in New Zealand.

The first sample analysed was historical to give us a benchmark. News stories from three months in 2005, well before the Campaign began, were taken from both print and broadcast media.

Three samples were analysed from three quarters in 2007 and 2008.

Historical – 2005

Analysis of the historical sample confirmed that New Zealand news stories often contained the same myths and flaws overseas research had identified.

Results showed:

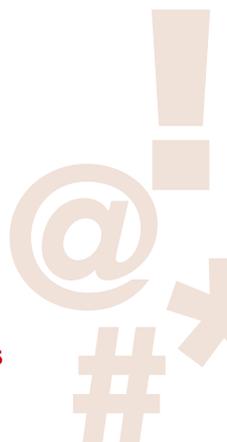
- few messages about the unacceptability of family violence
- stories were reactive
- stories about domestic violence were shorter and fewer than stories about non-domestic violence crimes
- 40% contained a myth
- family violence was not named
- euphemisms were common
- community spokespeople were rarely used
- no stories in provincial media.

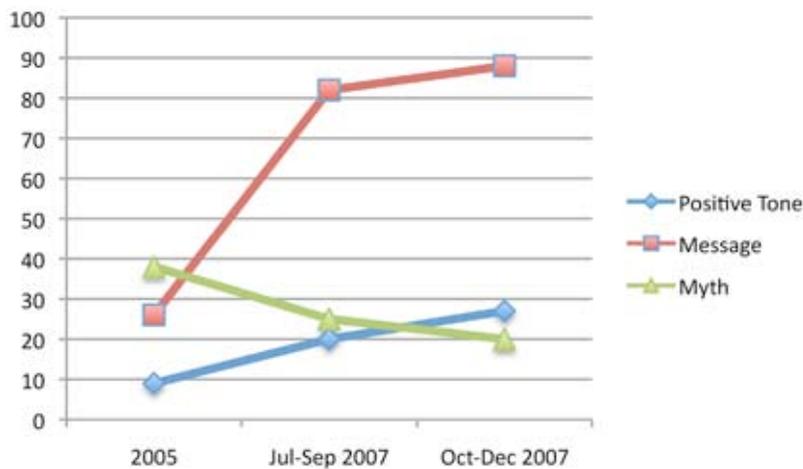
By the second half of 2007, news reporting had begun to change. Results showed:

- twice as many stories
- experts were used more often as sources
- 16% of family violence stories were on the front page or the lead item in a broadcast bulletin
- family violence was more likely to be named
- it was now referred to as a serious social problem
- graphic language was used by reporters
- a 15% increase in stories in local media.

Analysis of news stories in the first quarter of 2008 showed these changes had been sustained:

- 90% of stories had a message
- there were fewer myths
- It's not OK was commonly used
- language used by reporters condemned family violence
- Judges were speaking out.





The audits also showed us where more work was needed.

Elder abuse was virtually ignored by the news media, with two stories per quarter being the highest number. We subsequently worked with Age Concern delivering media training to their members, helping them develop strong key messages and promoting the value of engaging with the media.

The audits showed that Maori bashing was common in news stories.

They showed that there was a worrying focus on some family violence incidents or murders and not others, supporting stereotypes about who does family violence and where it happens.

We incorporated these findings into our media training workshop and seminar for journalists and provided stories ideas to address these.

MEDIA COMMENTATORS

The media audit gave us hard data to use when talking to editors and reporters – and media commentators.

The media advocacy project was featured in the media comment slot on Radio New Zealand's Nine to Noon programme.

An article was published in an international media magazine Ethical Space.

The project was presented at the Journalism Educators Conference in 2008.

There was scope for more discussion by media commentators, but the changes we wanted in news reporting happened much more quickly than we anticipated and the guidelines were clearly being used so we didn't pursue this.



MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

In 2008 the Wanganui Chronicle, a provincial daily newspaper, decided to run a campaign on family violence.

In 2007 the Wanganui Family Violence Network had asked for our media training workshop. Their subsequent media activity brought the topic of family violence to the attention of editorial staff at the Chronicle.

They realised family violence was a problem in Wanganui and asked for our seminar for journalists.

The editor and reporters were astounded to discover how much they didn't know about family violence and how myths could so easily creep into their stories.

The paper decided to run a campaign over two weeks – 12 issues – featuring stories and editorial on family violence every day. At least one page but up to four pages were dedicated to the campaign each day.

"We have never generated that amount of interest and feedback from any other campaign we've run. It was the best thing I've ever been involved with."

"Everyone was touched by what they were doing and what they were told, it was a wonderful journey for all of us."

In 2009 three Hawkes Bay community newspapers ran a series on family violence.

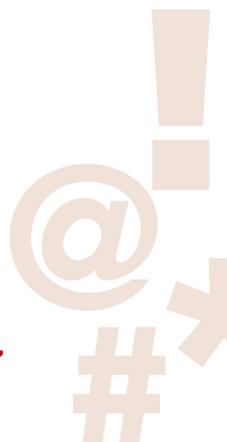
"I'm certain that we achieved the primary goal – to raise awareness of family violence."

"Personally I found writing the series very satisfying. In our small papers where a lengthy story is 400 to 500 words I sometimes feel we're just scratching the surface. Running 11 weeks of stories amounted to genuinely in-depth coverage."

In March 2010 The Nelson Mail ran a series of articles and an editorial to support a local poster campaign.

Now that three newspaper campaigns have been run and documented, other news outlets are interested in doing something similar. We know that giving in depth coverage and space to a topic can have a huge influence on a community's awareness and understanding of violence at home.

In 2010 the seminar for journalism schools is sought after and more newsrooms are asking for it, including New Zealand's big dailies the Christchurch Press and Dominion Post.





OTHER PARTNERS

Police

In 2008 NZ Police approached It's not OK and asked if the media training workshop could be delivered to Police.

Community family violence networks often include the local Police family violence coordinator, so some Police personnel had done the workshop in their community and passed feedback on to their superiors.

Police are ideally placed to speak out in the media on family violence because they:

- deal with family violence first hand
- are first on the scene of a crime
- have daily contact with the media.

Our media audit had shown that anything Police said would be used in a news story, even just a simple phrase like “family violence is not OK”.

Police engagement with the media tends to be reactive and factual, relating to particular cases they are working on. They are trained to give information cautiously.

So the idea of being proactive and using more general key messages about the unacceptability of family violence and the need for community ownership of solutions was new to them.

The workshop was delivered to a number of Police districts. Police frequently speak out now for White Ribbon Day, when crime statistics are released and over the Christmas New Year period when family violence rates soar.

We delivered a seminar to the annual conference of Police family violence coordinators and produced a media tips sheet for coordinators to use.

We have a number of them on our database of community spokespeople.

We are told when Police crime statistics will be released so that our community spokespeople can be ready with a statement on the day so that family violence crimes can be highlighted. In some communities the Police and local family violence prevention organisations do joint statements to the media.

In 2009 we were approached by detective level Police to develop a media handbook to assist detectives to speak out when they are working on family violence crimes.

They particularly wanted to avoid language which minimises family violence crimes, and to have strong key messages they could use without compromising their investigation. They wanted detectives to name the crime as family violence and alert New Zealanders to the warning signs that a victim is in danger.

Over the Christmas period 2009/10 the quality and quantity of Police comment on family violence was noticeable at this high prevalence time.

Judges

Our media audit showed that any comment made by a Judge about family violence was included in news stories, usually in the headline.

They were in news stories just by making a comment.

We met with the chief Family Court Judge and chief District Court Judge and shared the results of our media audit.

We collected examples of news stories showing the prominence given to Judges' comments throughout 2008 and forwarded these to the Judges.

Comments from Judges continue to be given prominence, often shaping the story and headline.

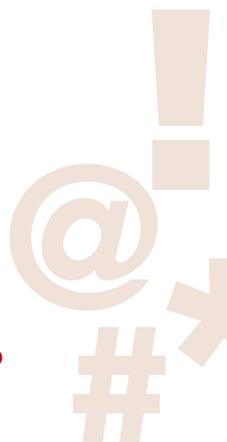
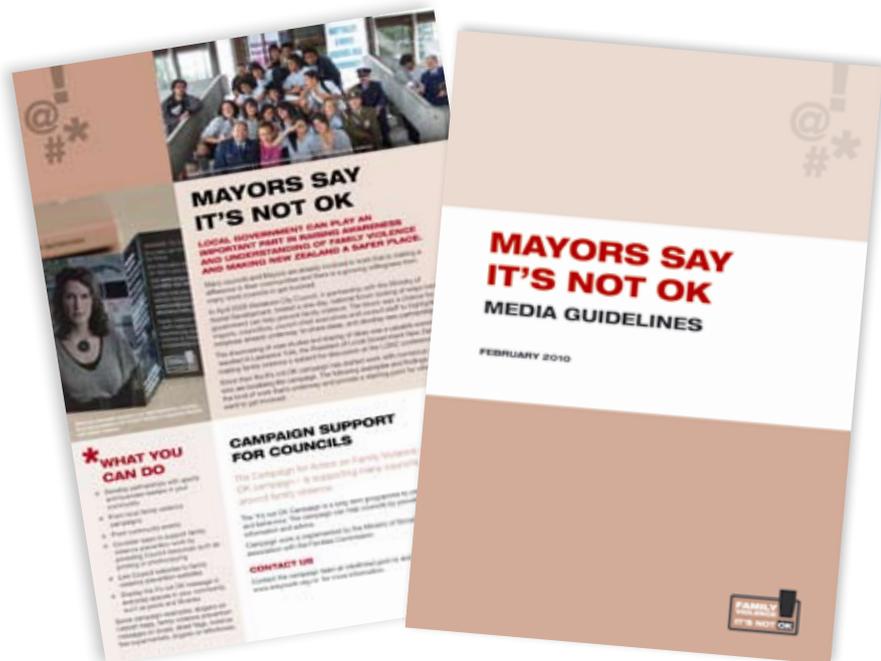
Our audit also showed that reporters are writing much more detailed and explicit stories when they cover family violence court cases. The nature and severity of the violence is likely to be described as well as the nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and victim.

This helps New Zealanders to understand the behaviours which are family violence.

Mayors

Mayors can use their public profile to take leadership on preventing family violence in their community. They can use their existing media profile to speak out about family violence.

We produced media guidelines for Mayors with key messages, suggested media opportunities, useful statistics and examples of successful media engagement by mayors.





SIGNIFICANCE FOR IT'S NOT OK

The media advocacy was a lead strategy for the It's not OK Campaign.

Starting early with the media advocacy helped embed the Campaign in communities and get buy in. Because the media training empowered community organisations and endorsed them as the experts on the topic, they felt they were an important part of the Campaign – that it belonged to them as much as to the Government.

The media advocacy has been a bridge builder with Police who have become a strong ally and partner in the Campaign.

The media advocacy project has made family violence news in New Zealand. Assaults on children, murders by family members and efforts to address our high rates of family violence make the news now.

The project has helped to link communities. The community spokespeople know they are part of a New Zealand wide pool of trained spokespeople who are giving the same messages in the media. Knowing they can phone up or email the Campaign for media advice has made them feel they are a valuable part of the Campaign.





LEARNINGS

The media advocacy project was successful because we worked WITH the media not against them.

We gave reporters and editors sound reasons for reporting family violence differently.

The media is driven by news and we respected that.

The project strategy was mutually beneficial for all involved:

- community spokespeople can get their message out
- reporters can get better stories
- other sectors can get positive media exposure
- the general public is better informed
- victims and perpetrators are able to ask for help.

The changes in the way the news media reports family violence have been sustained.

In 2010 family violence news stories are given prominence by print and broadcast media.

Family violence is treated as unacceptable and a serious problem in New Zealand.

Stories are no longer sympathetic to perpetrators. Several high profile cases have illustrated how this has changed:

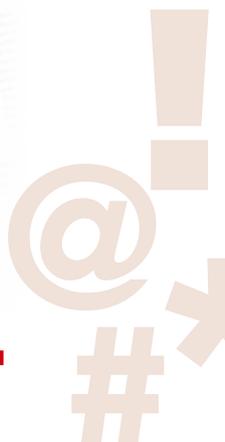
- The Tony Veitch case showed that high profile New Zealanders can no longer get away with violence to their partners because 'it's a private matter'
- The murder of Sophie Elliott brought partner violence and the importance of knowing the danger signs to the attention of the nation.

Stories contain statistics and details of how to get help. Expert spokespeople are used, and provincial media follow up national stories with local community spokespeople.

Family violence is named and the language used is often explicit.

More and more newspapers are deciding to run campaigns and support local efforts to reduce and prevent family violence.

The media advocacy project showed that using a social marketing approach to changing the way the news media reports a topic was successful. It built bridges between different sectors who can influence news reporting and created strong partners for the Campaign.





New Zealand Government