

Autumn 2012



Auckland
**Women's
Centre**

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Women's Centre

Gossip

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Centre hours

Monday to Friday

9am - 4pm

Library hours

Monday to Friday

9am - 4pm

plus Sat 11am - 1.30pm
on the first Sat of the
month

Thanks to Pub Charity for
funding this newsletter.

At the Women's Centre...

New Position - Social Worker

We are pleased to welcome Robyn Lambourne to our staff as our part time social worker. Robyn worked for nine years in the child protection team of Auckland Child, Youth and Family and is enjoying setting up the social worker role at the Centre. Robyn has four adult children and two mokopuna. She will be mainly working with Maori and Pasifika women.



Robyn Lambourne

SKIP Single Mums Positive Parenting Project

Rochelle is having a lot of fun engaging single mums with the Ministry of Social Development, SKIP messages. SKIP provides amazing resources to facilitate parents learning to manage children's behaviour as part of a loving, nurturing relationship. Rochelle has just finished five workshops at the wonderful, multi-cultural, Oasis South Roskill Hub and is now organising workshops in Waitakere. If you would like to be involved check out our Facebook page: SKIP Single Mums AWC, ring the Centre, or text Rochelle 021 0293 7195.

Information, Advice and Referral Service

Please phone, email, or drop in for friendly, non-judgemental assistance.

Courses and groups

This term we bring back our support groups Amazing Assertiveness for Women, Solo Mums': Resourcing the Source and our coming out support group Questioning? Rosanna Marks Belly Dancing was so successful last term that we've got her back for more. If you're ready to get stuck into some Autumnal crafting, Kate Millington is back with Mosaic Mash Up: The First Cut, and Margaret Lewis is back with her all levels Get Knitting course. Tone, stretch, kick, yell and read...our regulars, Women's Self Defence, Girls Self Defence, Women's Book Club, Yoga and Pilates will all be back this term, we look forward to seeing you here!

Women's Library

Thanks to the kindness of several women, we have had heaps of good books donated to the library over the last few months. We have also purchased a few goodies. Come in and have a look at the new and recommended shelf and choose something great to read. A year's sub is \$5 for beneficiaries and between \$10 and \$20 for everyone else. Our library is open Monday to Friday (9am - 4pm), and thanks to our wonderful team of library volunteers, we are also open on the first Saturday of the month from 11am to 1.30pm.

Great books currently on our recommendation shelf include: *Goodbye Sarajevo*: by Atka Reid and Hana Schofield, *March* by Geraldine Brooks, *As the Earth Turns Silver* by Alison Wong and *A Visit to the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan.

Therapeutic massage - one hour long sessions

Available for beneficiaries and other women on low incomes on Mondays between 9.30am and 3pm. Cost is \$25 for beneficiaries and \$40 for non-beneficiaries. Please book well in advance as demand is high.

Counselling

Low cost one-to-one counselling is available at the Centre. All counsellors are professionally trained and supervised. They use a sliding scale of \$40 to \$80 for fees and cater for a diverse range of issues. Please ring the Centre for appointment availability.

Family Court - hampered by anti-mother bias?

by Geraldine Whiteford, solicitor

Last September, the Ministry of Justice published A Review of the Family Court ("the report"). Despite addressing a wide range of issues, disappointingly, the report's key focus is reducing costs in the Family Court. The report comments that "costs in the Family Court have increased by 63% since 2004/5 with little evidence of improved outcomes for the parties, for example, by disposing of cases more quickly or by preventing repeat applications." The New Zealand Law Society ("NZLS") notes that this cost increase includes legal aid. When legal aid spending is removed, cost increases in the Family Court appear to be less than 50%.

Does the Family Court protect children's best interests?

Few people would doubt that the Family Court's processes are complex and slow. What is of concern is the Court's effectiveness. Looking at parenting orders under the Care of Children Act 2004 ("COCA"), how effective are the court's parenting orders in ensuring children's welfare and best interests? The report presents virtually no evidence or data on these questions.

In several articles and reports, Nicola Gavey, Vivienne Elizabeth and Julie Tolmie reported on intensive interviews of 21 women who had participated in the New Zealand Family Court. Despite this small sample, their research highlighted several issues:

- Family law professionals regularly downplay the significance of women's childcare work and expertise
 - These professionals often also downplay mothers' past and present exposure to coercive control.
 - Family Court processes often exacerbate conflict between parents.
 - Courts have been going to extreme lengths to preserve and expand father contact even where this poses risks to children's wellbeing and/or major costs to maternal wellbeing.
 - Alternative dispute resolution processes frequently gloss over power differences between the parties.
- (For more information about the above concerns see the submission by the Coalition for the Safety of Women and Children on AWC's website, in Hot Topics.)

Gavey, Elizabeth and Tolmie have suggested some excellent recommendations including the following:

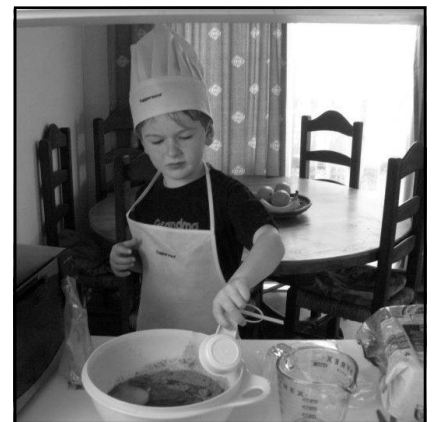
- The broadness of the welfare and best interests principle and how it is applied lead to uncertainty. Hence they support the "use of pre-separation parenting arrangements as a starting point for post-separation parenting arrangements to remedy the uncertainties created by current practice."
- The importance of children's contact with their fathers, post parental separation, needs to be considered in more creative ways and balanced against a wider range of considerations.
- Noting that fathers' groups have been organized and vocal in recent years, they recommend that the voice of mothers needs to be heard.
- That there be an audit of the gender implications of any proposal designed to reduce court costs.

How does the court address domestic violence?

In reviewing a sample of 173 COCA cases, the report notes that 51% had concurrent domestic violence proceedings. This statistic is not surprising given the shocking levels of domestic violence in this country. What perturbed me was the NZLS's comment that "*there is no evidential foundation to support the assertion that... overlapping applications under COCA and the Domestic Violence Act 1885 ("DVA") increase the complexity of proceedings and the likelihood of more delay and expense*".

Given the pernicious effects of domestic violence on women and children including their ability to participate in court proceedings, this comment is extraordinary.

Fortunately, Safer Homes in New Zealand Everyday ("SHINE") have made a comprehensive submission



addressing violence. SHINE comments that the report almost completely overlooks the issue of domestic violence.

SHINE's recommendations include the following:

- The priority in the Family Court should be to provide effective responses to domestic violence which will provide *long term* solutions rather than achieving cost reductions and efficiency.
- Lawyers for the child, only if they have received specialist domestic violence training, should be able to present views that are contrary to the child, as long as they can make the case that the views they set forth are in the best interests of the child's safety and welfare.
- The Family Court should implement policies that ensure that all victims dealt with by the court receive detailed information and support and are referred to appropriate agencies.
- The results of previous reviews concerning domestic violence should be implemented in full.
- All lawyers should be accredited to work in the Family Court.

Conclusion

Given the report's focus on cost cutting and its inability to grasp the complexity and seriousness of domestic violence, there is huge doubt as to how effective this review will be for women and children.

An Open Letter to Tui



Dear, Brian Blake, Managing Director, DB Breweries

Tui can keep its witty, irreverent, fun-loving brand without putting women down!

Tui's branding has many positive values – humour, smart, fun-loving, irreverence, mateship and anti-authoritarianism – which is why the brand is so popular, especially with young people. Unfortunately these values do not counter the fact

that one of the main values of the Tui brand is sexism. Sexism is clear in the messages on Tui's website, TV ads, Facebook page and billboards. Some of the humour Tui uses in its advertising is clever and this is used to override the sexism. "It is not sexist, it is just a joke" was a popular response on Tui's Facebook page to criticism of Tui's TV ads as sexist. However, the idea that humour or hyperbole can over-ride sexism is deeply problematic. Humour should never be used as an excuse to make sexism acceptable or harmless.

The Tui TV ads

Tui have a series of ads set in a beer factory run solely by women with men trying to break in to the factory to steal the beer. In these ads irreverence is portrayed as laddish, sexist behaviour - ogling women, violating women's private spaces, and the use of deception. One ad featured naked silhouettes of women in the shower with a man present. This suggests imagined ideal scenarios for men of being in a steamy room full of naked women. This scene represents voyeuristic practices and un-consented invasions by men into women's private spaces as humorous and funny (and thus acceptable) and as such potentially invites men to engage in such practices (Parker and Towns, 2011, on AWC's website).

Mateship in these ads is portrayed by the privileging of men's uncontrollable "primal desires" for beer over ethical male practices. Promoting men's entitlement to beer and pleasure while portraying women as the ones who stand in their way is offensive. Male entitlement is one of the beliefs held by men who are violent to women.

The women in the ads are all stereotypically gorgeous and are dressed in skimpy clothing. There are close up shots of the women's breasts, bare midriffs and behinds. At a basic level, the ads reinforce beliefs that women are objects who can be used and easily manipulated/controlled. We are not arguing that such advertising images directly cause men to abuse women. Rather, these ads reinforce dangerous beliefs e.g. male entitlement, women as the gate-keepers of pleasure and fun, and women as objects that

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men can control, that contribute to a culture that subtly condones violence against women and girls. We know that damaging representations of women in the media have long-term corrosive effects on women's and girls' feelings of self worth and beliefs about acceptable body image. They are considered to contribute to self-destructive behaviours such as eating disorders and self-harm, along with anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. The cumulative effect contributes to women's disadvantaged position in a number of areas, including the labour market and in access to decision-making positions.

Tui Billboards – “Sorry Babe, I was talking to the dog - Yeah Right”

On its website Tui runs a Yeah Right competition for the public to suggest potential billboard slogans. The rules of the completion include that the entry is “**not overtly sexist or sexual**”. Yet Tui's own advertising does not honour its own guidelines. The official Tui billboard quoted above implies that women are “bitches”. In popular culture “your bitch” is someone you are dominant over. This is extreme sexism from Tui and may explain why the billboard was not displayed for long, and Tui has not posted it on its website or Facebook page.



If we want to prevent men's domestic violence towards women then the promotion of respectful and ethical masculinities and equitable relationships between men and women needs to be encouraged community-wide, particularly by influential companies like Tui's owners, DB breweries. If our efforts to promote such ethical masculinities and relationships are constantly countered by popular cultural representations of male practices and men's relationships with women that undermine these goals, then we will not stop violence against women.

The media creates, reflects and enforces attitudes in society; therefore all advertisements should be prepared with a due sense of social responsibility to consumers and to society. Tui can keep its witty, irreverent, fun-loving brand without putting women down.

At the time of writing Tui is to be congratulated for not having any sexist billboards on display. Now would be a good time to replace the “women running the beer factory” ads with witty ads that both men and women can support. We have had enough of Tui using tired stereotypical material that is demeaning to women and insulting to men. We would like to discuss these issues with you. Please contact us at your earliest convenience.

Extend Paid Parental Leave!

There is a possibility that New Zealand's woefully inadequate amount of paid parental leave will be extended. Labour MP Sue Moroney's bill to extend the leave from 14 paid weeks to 26 was pulled from the ballot and has majority support in parliament. Hours after it was selected the National Party said they would use their veto rights to prevent the bill from becoming law. National argues that the bill would have “more than a minor impact” on the Government's finances. The Government explained that it is worried about the large amount of money it is borrowing every week to pay for its costs.

What the Government is not saying is that the reason it has to borrow such large sums is because of the massive tax cuts it gave to the rich in 2008. It went ahead with these tax cuts to the top income earners even after the 2007 “credit crunch”. New Zealand could afford to provide decent paid parental leave if the Government introduced higher taxes for the highly paid and the over-paid and brought in a comprehensive tax on all capital gains, except for the family home.

Paid parental leave has been shown in countless studies to improve the well being of babies and their families. Julie at The Hand Mirror Blog makes the important point that extending leave to 6 months will make it more viable for many fathers to share the leave, increasing equity in the parents' relationship. Paid parental leave is increasingly seen by employers to benefit their organisation by increasing the number of employees returning to work after parental leave. This provides a cost-effective means of retaining skilled staff; and improving organisational efficiency through the benefits of long service, e.g. institutional memory, industry knowledge, networks and contacts.