

Thirty Years of the Vanuatu Women's Centre: Her Story



VWC's Office at Rue d'Anjou, Nambatu, Port Vila

September 2022

Supported by



GENDER

*Gender, Hullo! Welcome to my country
 You came in the appropriate time
 Actually, late
 The men are fighting for their world
 The women are shouting from the bottom of the valley
 There is Gender War going on*

*Gender, you cannot be in the donor's purse
 You should be in me, in my family
 My village, community and country
 Where have you been?
 With them?
 NO ... You – Gender Blind!*

*Best with Us Women
 In programs, activities,
 Government's policies,
 NGO's activities
 Business management.
 EVERYWHERE*



*Gender, I Like You
 To Promote Disaggregated Data
 And Check on Gender Relations
 For Gender Analysis, and
 Gender Sensitive ME and all of us
 To Give me Gender Justice
 And Gender Equality*

*Merilyn Tahigogona
 Founding/Former Coordinator (1999)*

Vanuatu Women's Centre

You gave me reason to:

- *Believe in myself, despite of the challenges I faced in life;*
- *Realize and understand the inequalities in our society;*
- *Understand that it is the unequal power relationship between males and females that enables males to continue to perpetrate violence against women and girls; despite how it is masked;*
- *Believe that it must be named as men's violence against women and girls, not generally named as 'vaelens';*
- *Persevere to assist women, despite the challenges and obstacles;*
- *Create network, memories and life-long friends and allies in Vanuatu, the Pacific and the world;*
 - *Be Who I am.*

© Tatavola Matas, August 2021

VWC Coordinator

(Appointed 2020 following Merilyn's transition to Technical Advisor)



Please note: parts of this report may be confronting or distressing for some readers

This publication includes examples of different forms of violence against women and children.

Please contact the Vanuatu Women's Centre, its provincial branches or CAVAWs if you would like to talk about your own or others' experiences of violence against women and children – see contact details on the back cover of this report.

Call 161 toll-free (24 hours) if you need help urgently.

Acknowledgements

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Finally, VWC thanks all the clients who have put their trust in the centre.

Disclaimer

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Vanuatu Women's Centre 2022 Thirty Years of the Vanuatu Women's Centre: Her Story VWC, Port Vila.

About this book and its authors

This book was a highly collaborative effort. Both Marilyn Tahi and Juliet Hunt edited the contributions. It was compiled by Juliet Hunt, who also did the layout.

Marilyn Tahi tells her story in Chapter 1, during an interview with Juliet Hunt. She starts by sharing the story of how the idea of the Vanuatu Women's Centre was sparked, followed by a section about the challenges and achievements of the early days through to 1999, when VWC first received multi-year funding from the Australian Government. She then talks about the decade of expansion in the reach and services of the centre, from 2000 to 2010. This is followed by her reflections on the third decade (2011 to 2020), when there is much evidence of VWC's expanding impacts across the country, before sharing some thoughts about what may lie ahead in future.

In the final section in Chapter 1, readers will gain some insight into what motivates this remarkable woman. She tells us a bit about her family and some formative life experiences, before she set her mind to the task of building an organisation that ni-Vanuatu have shown they trust and value.

Many lessons about strategy emerge from Marilyn's recollections and reflections – about the most effective ways to prevent and respond to violence against women, how to modify what has been learned from overseas to suit the Vanuatu context, how to innovate to meet the special needs of Vanuatu (such as through the setting up of rural Committees Against Violence Against Women – CAVAWs), and how to build a strong and sustainable organisation over three decades. She shares lessons about how VWC addressed the challenge of navigating through custom and culture, and provides tips on what has guided her as an organisational leader.

In chapters 2 to 5, we see first-hand how VWC staff and supporters were able to change hearts, minds and behaviours through short narratives and poems, in Bislama, English and French (Vanuatu's three official national languages). In Chapter 2, the two other VWC co-founders share their memories of what it was like back then, along with supporters and staff from the early days and a former CAVAW member. We witness their enormous courage as they stepped up to deal with resistance and opposition to their efforts to claim women's human and legal rights.

Chapter 3 provides readers with some personal perspectives on challenges and achievements of VWC. We hear from a few of VWC's most steadfast and hard-working male advocates, as well as from both long-serving VWC and younger staff members. We also hear from the son of one of VWC's longest-serving Counsellors.

Chapter 4 takes us on some personal journeys, with both recent and long-serving staff members. We see through their eyes how much having a service like the Vanuatu Women's Centre means to women living with violence. We also learn first-hand how staff have been mentored by the VWC leadership over the years. Chapter 5 focuses on why Vanuatu needs the Vanuatu Women's Centre, with contributors' thoughts often expressed through poetry.

These stories, reflections and poems hold many lessons for others wanting to build viable civil society organisations, and for those working anywhere in the Pacific region or the world to eliminate violence against women and children.

We hope you will enjoy reading this important piece of Vanuatu history – her story.

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The current Coordinator of VWC, Tatavola Matas (left) and her mentor and co-founder/former Coordinator of VWC, Marilyn Tahi (right)



Chapter 1:

Merilyn Tahī tells the Vanuatu Women's Centre Story

How it all began

At the beginning of this story, I want to say I am one of the many SURVIVORS of violence against women and domestic violence! And I had also met many other women and children who had been survivors of domestic violence.

How was the seed for the Vanuatu Women's Centre first planted, and who was involved?

My official work with the women began in 1985 when I was elected President of the Vanuatu National Council of Women (VNCW); my term ended in 1989. I attended the Third World Forum for Women in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985 on behalf of the VNCW.ⁱ At that time, I was working for the Vanuatu Government as Assistant Secretary for Foreign Affairs. My husband, Mr Onneyn Tahī who was the Minister of Education and had responsibilities for women's affairs in his portfolio, represented the Government in the same meeting. As President of VNCW, I had presided over VNCW's National Conferences and heard about the various issues women raised. I was elected to be President of the Port-Vila Town Council of Women after that (from 1989 to 1993), but I gave up that role in 1993 after Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC) was established.



During this time with VNCW I met Elizabeth Mermer, who was President of the Efate Council of Women, or Mautfer Council of Women, as it was called then. VNCW work was good, strong in the country and in rural communities, and had impact. Similar to other Councils of Women in the Pacific region, this was our women's movement in Vanuatu.

I had just finished my role as a Second Political Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the Lini Government in 1991. There was a Vote of No Confidence in the Prime Minister – the first ever – in Father Walter Hadye Lini's Government. I was out of a formal job and had no salary, but quickly found time to cook and sell food from my car to earn a bit of money.

I had known Shamima Ali, Coordinator of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) from a meeting in New Caledonia at the SPCⁱⁱ and I had also met her in Vanuatu. I received an invitation to attend the First Regional Workshop on Violence against Women in Fiji hosted by FWCC. FWCC had already begun their work on the elimination of violence against women (EVAW) and especially sexual assault. They had a lot of experience in this work, because they began in 1984.ⁱⁱⁱ I accepted the invitation from Shamima, because I was a survivor and wanted to know more, and I also wanted to use the information to help others.

The invitation from FWCC was also sent to the VNCW, and they nominated Elizabeth Mermer to represent them. The Vanuatu Police also received an invitation, so they nominated Janet Saksak Boedovo who was in the Crime Prevention Unit in the Port Vila station.

So the three of us went to this first training which was held from 10-28 August, 1992. It was held at Bergengren House close to the Peninsula Hotel in Suva and Shamima was the main facilitator. Representatives from over ten countries attended. This was the first time ever that violence against women was talked about in the Pacific at a regional level.

"This was the first time ever that violence against women was talked about in the Pacific at a regional level."

What and who influenced you three women to set up a new organisation? What were your motivations and hopes?

During the meeting in Suva, we were asked to make some plans for follow-up and submit these to FWCC. One of our plans was to set up a centre in Vanuatu, similar to FWCC. After the team returned to Vila on the 30th August 1992, we three women met immediately – we had planned on the flight coming home to meet as soon as we arrived. That meeting was held at the then Hotel Rossi (now La Tentation). This is when we set up our committee for the Vanuatu Women's Centre, on 2nd September 1992. This was a Collective and included some members of the Port Vila Town Council of Women, police and other interested volunteers. Elizabeth Mermer and I sat in a room at Independence Park to do this work.

We felt that the information we received from Fiji was new and fresh, and we wanted to share it. We felt that FWCC would be there to support us in our plans for this new road. We felt that we had found a solution for women in our country, something to assist them in their lives, something to help them with all the domestic violence they were facing. We learned that domestic violence was an issue not just for our women, and ourselves, but also for the Pacific region, as well as a global issue.

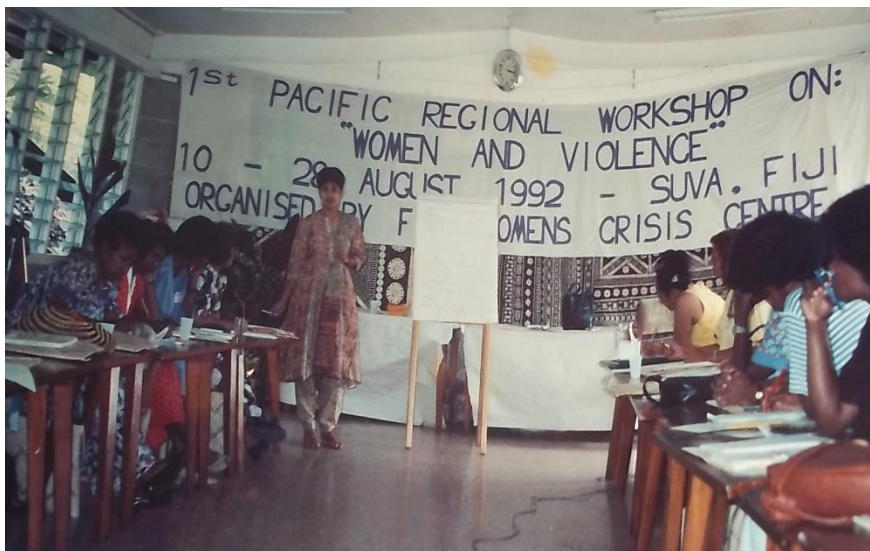
We knew that we were the only three women in the country now with this information, and I felt very confident that we three can do something. The first thing we had to do was inform our husbands of our plans.

Personally, I felt that it was necessary to do something to address violence against women in the country, because I had lived with this problem, and I knew many other women who had experienced domestic violence – but there was no service available for them. No organisations or government agencies were addressing this issue in the 1990s. There was nothing at all, not even churches or cultural groups were talking about it or doing anything.



Banner prepared by the 3 ni-Vanuatu participants at the First Pacific Regional Workshop on Women and Violence

My hope was to set up a crisis centre similar to the FWCC. When we heard about their work, we were overwhelmed, and we felt that we can do it too. At our first meeting after we returned home, we strategized and planned to lobby and advocate for this NEW initiative – a service for survivors of violence against women and children and domestic violence. We wanted the support of Government leaders, Chiefs and church leaders, and VNCW. We also wanted to get the police, Public Solicitor, Prosecutions and Courts to hear us, and to know their views on this idea. So we planned meetings with all these people, and we went to see them.



Shamima Ali, Coordinator of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, facilitates a workshop session

It is interesting that from the very beginning, you wanted to reach out to all these other people. I wonder if that is unusual or special about you, that you felt you needed to reach out to so many different stakeholders?

I think this is something about VWC right throughout up until today. Reaching out has always been a big part of VWC's work. I don't want to promote myself, but I think this was partly due to my prior work with Government over twenty years, and my diplomatic work with the Australian Consulate and the Australian High Commission. I felt from the beginning that we had to work with them, and be recognised by them – otherwise, I knew we would not get anywhere. After having gone through the regional meeting in Fiji, it sounded to me like we really need all these people – such as police, Courts, Chiefs, church leaders and women's leaders – because you are working with survivors of crimes.

By the time I went to Fiji for the regional meeting, I had already been sensitised to gender discrimination and women's oppression, as President of the VNCW since 1985. And I think I had always been aware of these types of issues at some level from my early years, and wanted to do work for women, even back when I was at school. I joined Girl Guides when I was at secondary school. I learned about doing community service through the Duke of Edinburgh awards scheme, and I loved doing that; I went into women's sports and athletics, and for all these things I had to meet and work with other people.

My involvement in the Vanuatu Independence struggle also influenced my thinking a lot about how VWC was set up. I knew that we had to make our Government work. I am very nationalistic in that sense - it is your Government, it is you, and you cannot go anywhere else,

"My involvement in the Vanuatu Independence struggle also influenced my thinking a lot about how VWC was set up."

you must work with the Government. They have to be responsible for getting things right for women. So I felt that the Government had to be on board from day one, and they were all on board. I believed that Vanuatu leaders of the new independent country would see and agree and approve of our plan for a crisis centre – such as young educated Christian leaders, the Prime Minister, Ministers, the President of the Malvatumauri, Vanuatu Council of Churches, VNCW, the Public Solicitor and the Chief Justice.

That doesn't mean that they understood the issue of violence against women. I had some status that I had earned myself from my own efforts along my journey up to then. So I think they believed in me; they knew that I could achieve things. In the Vanuatu Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I became an Assistant Secretary and I had worked with many of the people that I needed to reach out to when setting up VWC. They also knew me from the political struggle. It wasn't very long after we were all in the political struggle together when we set up VWC just 12 years later.

Many of the people who I had to go to and ask for support in those early years of VWC were also people I knew from the political struggle, such as Minister Sathy Regenvanu, who was Minister for Women when Parliament ratified CEDAW in 1995, Father Walter Lini, and Kalkot Kelekele who was in the Government also when CEDAW was passed. From the beginning, we were talking about women's rights, non-discrimination and gender equality. So it wasn't that our leaders were ignorant, it was part of the evolution of our country. During that twelve years, they were trying to make the Government work, and I was trying to push through this other agenda on women's rights. I was one of them. I was one of many silent women there in the political struggle from the early days, following them right through in the political congresses, and part of the Vanua'aku Party Women's Wing during the struggle. So when I went to speak with them, they agreed, because they knew me from the political struggle and my employment in Government. It worked. Chief Willie Bong Matur was the President of the Malvatumauri at that time, and he was also supportive.

So our approach in reaching out to Government was a bit different from FWCC's. I always understood that Government is different from non-government organisations (NGOs), but I wanted us to find a way to work together. Because when Vanuatu became independent, the leaders forgot the women. They didn't find places for women in the ministries and leadership. Even though a couple of women found places through the cracks, they forgot the majority of women. I wanted to find a place for women within the Government.

The other thing that was a strong motivation for me was that I am a survivor! And at that time, who could I look to? Nobody, there were no services here. Thank goodness the women have us now. So I was also looking for help, and I knew there were a lot of other women also, because they had shared their experiences with me. So I had been looking and asking: how do all of us who have been through this, where do we go? Until – hooray! The regional meeting in Fiji! Oh OK, so here it is, here is the solution for us! So we took it, and then we modified the solution to suit Vanuatu.

Lessons about strategy:

- Reaching out has always been a big part of VWC's work
- The VWC founders learned the fundamental principles and strategies of how to address violence against women and children from FWCC, but from the very beginning they modified these to suit the different context in Vanuatu
- There was an enabling environment for the establishment of VWC, due to the many discussions internationally and regionally about women's rights and a global movement on the empowerment of women
- Strong motivation and commitment were key ingredients in VWC's early success and achievements

During the Condominium^{iv}, when the Independence struggle happened and up to 1980, there was no talk about anything like domestic violence at all – nothing. There were a lot of assaults going on, but nobody heard about it, nobody knew about it or talked about it or identified with it. But by the time VWC was opening its doors, twelve years later, there was a global movement on the empowerment of women. This was talked about at the national meetings of VNCW, because of international and regional work to raise these issues – such as the first two global conferences on women that Grace Molisa and Hilda Lini attended, and the third one that I went to in Nairobi^v. Those who attended regional meetings were also bringing these messages back, and starting to talk about these issues. They were not necessarily talking about violence against women (VAW), but CEDAW.

I was already interested in women's issues, my ears were hot at that time, and I was reading, I was listening. I was working in Government, so I was aware and hearing about these things. So all that created an enabling environment to establish VWC. VNCW were beginning to take up issues related to women's rights: Rolenas Lolo and Grace Molisa went to the Cook Islands for a meeting, and that is when they started to talk about CEDAW and they brought it back here, and then we went to Nairobi and came back in 1985. All those things were leading up to it. When I was President of VNCW, we were also doing a lot of work on women's issues. And all during my time with VNCW and the Port Vila Town Council of Women, and when I was Immediate Past President of VNCW, I was hearing simmering issues of women saying that their husbands were beating them up.

What were your fears? It sounds as though you were not going to let any fears stop you. Were you already convinced of how wide the problem of violence against women and children is?

Yes, that is right, I wanted to do something. But I was not already convinced of how very wide the problem is, because there was no data, you couldn't hear it, nobody was talking about it. If they beat you, you couldn't go anywhere. Nationally there was no real acknowledgement of it, although Grace Molisa did do a poster with a fist on it for VNCW, with a message to stop domestic violence. Grace was aware from the regional and national work, although VNCW was not specifically addressing this issue.

There were fears, as well as determination. We feared we will fail, or not achieve our plans, because there was nothing to fall back to in Vanuatu, that we could learn from. There were fears that our husbands may stop us.

Another big fear was that the authorities wouldn't allow such things, because they may not see why it is essential. This was a new idea, it might be hard to influence the leaders – especially as it is a gender discrimination and women's rights issue, and Vanuatu has strong beliefs about a man's place, and sees females as having less value. We heard this in the training in Fiji. We knew that males have strong positions in communities. Our leaders in all sectors still are dominated by males. This was a challenge in bringing out these issues. Vanuatu was then – and is still today – a male dominated society, and females are not appreciated. But they did allow us to operate with no hesitation.

On the other hand, we believed in ourselves that we could do it, including that we could influence leaders. I believe that our inner feelings were all strong – and we were all determined to do it, and we went on to plan our first activities. Our curtain raiser for the plan we made in Fiji – for a project on ending violence against women and children (VAWC) and services for survivors

Curtain raiser!

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence campaign in November-December 1992, marked with an exhibition at the French Embassy in Port Vila, and the first 5-day workshop on violence against women, only one year after this global campaign was launched by the Center for Women's Global Leadership

– was the 16 Days of Activism^{vi} in November/December 1992, when we held an exhibition on the issue at the French Embassy.

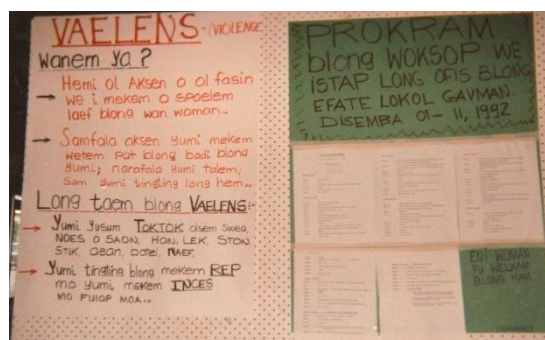
Did other women support you?

Some came along – but many didn't know what this was all about, because it was new. They were learning as we went along. Some just came along from the beginning, especially the strong women from our first Collective meeting. There were strong women on there from the police, and from the education sector, and most of them were from my Port Vila Town Council of Women. Other women who had prominent roles were also supportive – such as Rolenas Lolo who was with VNCW then, Grace Molisa, Hilda Lini, and Madame Bulekon. Andy Lynch and Delphine Vuti were in our Collective.

There were also women who asked why we need to talk about this issue, and who believed that women deserve to be beaten, but there were no major incidents of opposition. The Women's Affairs Unit (it wasn't a department then) were all behind us. There was a sense of – let's work for women's empowerment. Unlike the period of the Independence struggle, we didn't have Francophone opposition either. The two camps were working well, because we had both Francophone and English women on the first collective.



Participants at VWC's first 5-day workshop on violence against women, Port Vila, 1992



Poster at the 16 Days campaign exhibition, advertising VWC's first workshop

The early days (1992 – 1999)

Tell me about the early days.

We were registered as a committee and we called ourselves the Vanuatu Women's Centre because we didn't want people to get scared of the word "crisis". Shamima had mentioned in the Fiji regional meeting that crisis meant that something needed to be fixed now. We wanted to open it up a bit. We wanted women to be feeling good about coming in, and not only if they were in a crisis.

We didn't have any money. We had to get money from out of our pockets, and also from our husbands. We hid a little money from them to support the work. I was using the money from my little food business, Elizabeth Mermer's husband was working, so we got small money from him. It was no more than 100 vatu, every now and again.

Janet Saksak Boedovo was supportive, but went back to her police job immediately. It was Elizabeth Mermer and me sitting in the office until 1993 when Maie Biagk came along. We were all working as volunteers. Some people think that we got big money from the beginning, but it wasn't like that – we had 100 vatu, 10 vatu. We spent it on stationary and women's urgent needs. Women's Affairs gave us a tiny little room in their own office free of charge at Independence Park which we were in for about a year (where the Central School Kindergarten is now). We saw nine clients in that first four months in that room. If we had to transport clients to the hospital or go to the Post Office or buy stationary, I sometimes used my car. That is how we were up until July 1994 when we got our first funding from Australian Aid, although we were negotiating for funding since the very beginning.



The Hon Minister for Justice, Culture, Women and Religion, Sethy Regenvanu visits VWC in 1993

Roslyn Tor was Head of Women's Affairs when the Government gave us vt100,000 at one stage – that is all the money that the Government has given to VWC until today. The New Zealand Government gave us things like a stove and a mattress. The Chief Justice Vincent Lunabek helped us to get some furniture from the Public Works Department. He told them "give them that, give them that" – that is the cane table that is still in the VWC Library, as well as some cane chairs, lounge chair, a cane bookshelf and some tables that we are still using today.

We moved into a new office in 1993, also at Independence Park. That building was used by the Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs and when they moved out, the Government allowed us to use it. I think the Women's Affairs Unit organised it for us. It was 2-3 rooms, with more space, and was also rent-free. We stayed there



until 1995 until we were evicted by former Honorable Prime Minister Maxime Carlot Korman. He wrote a letter and told us to go – so we had to leave. We already had the Tua Theatre group then, so we rented rooms in the Socapor Building. By that time we had some money from donors, like the Australian Government through the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and the New Zealand Government. We stayed there about a year or so, and then we moved again, up to the

Sandra building at Nambatu (now called Wen Xin), where we stayed for some years before we had to move again.

By 1993 and 1994, FWCC and the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women (PWNAVAW)^{vii} were already talking about the Beneath Paradise project, which Sabet Cox and Juliet Hunt were involved in. Beneath Paradise prepared Pacific women to share their experiences, work and issues at the NGO Forum parallel to the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, held in 1995 in Beijing.^{viii} We were feeling a little bit stronger by then.

By 1995 we had the Vanuatu ratification of CEDAW, which only happened because VWC was up and running in 1992 and we had been lobbying for it. At our International Women's Day celebrations in 1995, which we held at Hotel Rossi (now La Tentation), we got people to come and celebrate with us there and we were talking about CEDAW.

Prior to that we had held a workshop on this, and then on National Women's Day on 15th May, there was a celebration that VNCW and VWC worked on together at VNCW's property at Anambrou, when Honourable Minister Sethy Regenvanu came and officiated and announced he would table the ratification of CEDAW in Parliament. We had petitioned the Vanuatu Government to ratify CEDAW, otherwise we said there is no point going to the Beijing Conference. People came to the workshop and we decided we should have a petition, and VWC got the women to sign it. That is how we got CEDAW ratified. Beijing was the first delegation where both a Vanuatu Government and non-government delegation went together. We told them, if you don't ratify it, then don't go. If VWC was not there, it would not have come in. Although VNCW was in favour, there was a strong lobby from VWC.

"We told them, if you don't ratify CEDAW, then don't go to Beijing. That is how we got CEDAW ratified."

So you were already working on educating and lobbying from those very early days?

From the very beginning, from 1992 onwards, when we were sitting in that little room, we were already going out and spreading the word, as well as doing the counselling. We had our brochures that we put together with Andy Lynch. As soon as she heard about us, she came on board straight away, because she was a psychologist. She came to participate in our workshops and meetings, we saw that she was an asset, as a university graduate – she was on the VWC Collective, volunteering in lots of ways. We utilised her skills in many ways including counselling and training, until she got involved in working with people living with disabilities.

Our first major community awareness-raising was the 16 Days of Activism in 1992, and then immediately after that we started to organise for International Women's Day on 8th March 1993. The VWC radio programs also began around that same time. I still have the *Daily Post* cut-out with our pictures in the newspaper when we first started VWC. I was already doing walkabout radio programs in my earlier jobs, so we were friends with the media and using print and radio media a lot before we got our first funding from overseas donors. Our first posters in the French Embassy for 16 Days in 1992 were done by hand.

Lesson about strategy:

- VWC always had a holistic and comprehensive approach to addressing violence against women and children
- Counselling was the fundamental base, with the learning from women's experiences shaping prevention strategies and approaches through community education and awareness, media and advocacy work
- Training volunteers and staff, as well as other stakeholders, was also in place from the very beginning

We set up the Tua Theatre group, because we wanted a theatre group to help us go out with awareness raising activities. Wan Smol Bag was around already, but they couldn't help us. So we set up our own group. We had them for 5 years from 1995 to 1999 and we were sad to let them go. They helped a lot and we took them out to the communities wherever we went. It helped with our awareness-raising and our publicity for VWC, but also for the issues. They did songs and plays.



Campaigns began early: supporters on the first march through Vila



Merilyn with members of the Tua Theatre Group, which helped with awareness-raising on the issues in communities

The first major funding for VWC's work came from the Australian Government in July 1994, with the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) as VWC's managing agent. Also in 1994, the British High Commission covered the cost of VWC's first brochures in Bislama and English, and the French version was funded by the French Embassy in Port Vila. The first funding from the New Zealand Government came in 1995, for safehouse services, and for the establishment of the first branch of VWC, the Sanma Counselling Centre. We wanted our next branch in the second largest town. We already had a CAVAW there before that.

Early donor support came from Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom

You started advocating for the Family Protection Act very early. How did that begin?

We started advocating for legislation on domestic violence back in 1997, because of the Vanuatu Government's Comprehensive Reform Program (CRP). The Government set up committees on different issues to inform the CRP. VWC, VNCW and others such as the National Worker' Union were on the CRP Social Committee. We talked about several different issues on this committee, so I was able to talk about the social issues affecting families including domestic violence. That was in October 1997. By then we had experience and data since 1992 from VWC, so as I was talking about it, I said that we should have legislation on domestic violence. So that is how it started. We gave our reports to the CRP Committee and that went to the Council of Ministers, and this was one of the recommendations that was taken up from our CRP Social Committee.

How did that happen? What helped to encourage them to take it up?

We were working together with VNCW, and I was the Past President. It was an inclusive process where we all worked together well, including with Women's Affairs. There was support in our Social Committee for the recommendation, and it stayed on in there into the CRP. We were very happy to see our recommendation on domestic violence legislation in the final CRP.

There wasn't much specific domestic violence legislation around in the region then. So where did the idea come from?

I was well aware of the need for legislation, and that you can use legislation to protect women, because we had been seeing clients since 1992. I had been in Government for about twenty years, so I saw the power of the law and the need for legal protection. This was not an idea that came from Fiji or anywhere else at that time, it was from here. I think it was also partly due to the fact that we had started off in 1992 in such an inclusive way with Government. One of our 3 founders, Janet Saksak Boedovo was also a Police Officer, even though in a junior position. So that was also a little spark. In our Collective meetings, she would be talking about police work. We did already have the Penal Code, with Section 107 focused on general assault. But when it came to domestic violence, it wasn't known then, and it was seen as OK for a man to beat his wife. We could use Section 107 back then, and we did try.

I remember when we had the first workshop in Suva to develop FWCC's training manual in 2004^{ix}, you were the only one in the group of regional participants who was saying that you wanted domestic violence recognised as a crime. Everyone else was focusing mainly on domestic violence as a human rights issue, rather than as a crime.

For us, it was of course an issue of human rights. But then what? All our countries had those Penal Codes, and those Codes were saying that it was *tabu* to use violence against anyone. That anyone includes domestic violence, but it wasn't picked up and used to protect women. When a husband beats his wife, it was seen as OK, something different from the Penal Code offences. But why should it be different when a husband assaults his wife? My Collective had this awareness, with Janet Saksak Boedovo, and also Delphine Vuti and Maryline George, who supported VWC enormously, and who went on to be very senior Police Officers in CID and later in the Sexual Offences Unit when it was set up in 1996.

After the recommendation went up to the CRP, it was a long process, going from the Social Committee and to the next level and next level until it reached the Prime Minister. It was a lot of work to develop the CRP for the Government to change some things to make this country better. There were a lot of meetings from 1997 to 1999 to lobby for the legislation to be introduced. The Government did the drafting, the Attorney-General's Office. The first draft came out in 1998 and when it came out, we saw it, and we were also continually advocating from outside that the Government and the CRP must have this legislation.

We weren't happy with the first draft. It was from the New Zealand legislation, almost word for word. We said no, and others said no, and it went back to the State Law Office to redraft. I think they had three drafts. They took on board the majority of our comments. We wanted people in the community where the rural women could get help (included in the final legislation as authorised persons). We didn't want bride price to be used as a defence, because we had already seen that, that was our experience in Court already – so we said, don't do that. For the definition of domestic violence, we talked about it, but when it was written up, it wasn't exactly what we had said. So in the Family Protection Act that was

Lessons about strategy:

VWC were pioneers in their advocacy for dedicated legislation to address the issues of violence against women and children.

- It took 10 long years of persistent advocacy for the Family Protection Act to be passed by Parliament
- VWC's inclusive approach helped to get legislation on the Comprehensive Reform Program (CRP) agenda – using data on the number of clients collected from the time VWC was established, and working together with a range of Government and civil society stakeholders

passed, they didn't use our definition of the meaning of domestic violence. They listed the different types of violence, such as physical assault, sexual assault, emotional violence, stalking, indecency, threatening. So the Family Protection Act (FPA) does not have the proper meaning of domestic violence. If they are going to amend the FPA, we want the proper meaning of it. So that is why when we go out to workshops in the community, we take time to explain the meaning of domestic violence.

How is domestic violence explained in VWC workshops and trainings?

Wanem Mining blong DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Hem ya toktok long Inglis lanwis. Long Bislama yumi raetem olsem DOMESTIK VAELENS.

Vaelens hemi tokbaot ol fulap defdefren RABIS o NOGUD Fasin we istap gohet long ol gel mo woman fromwe oli ol WOMAN.

DOMESTIK: mining blong hem se ol RABIS mo NOGUD fasin ya oli gohet ensaet long wan RILESENSIP. Oli gohet ensaet long wan FAMILI o long wan HOM.

Wanem ya GENDER BASE VIOLENCE?

Ol fasin ya fulap taem OL MAN nao oli mekem long ol woman blong olketa (olsem gelfren o waef o sista o mama o bubu woman).

Ol defren FASIN blong Vaelens:

Ikat fulap defren kaen vaelens olsem rabis fasin blong seks, faet, mekem ol fasin blong iharem nogud, mekem ol strong toktok o aksen blong hemi fraet. No shearem mane. Sam fasin blong kastom mo kalja mo jios, mo fulap moa.

In the FPA it says that the Court should take into account that the man has organised a custom ceremony. If a man says: "Your worship, I have organised a custom ceremony for next week", the law allows them to go and do the custom ceremony, and then come back for the hearing. What we are saying is that the sentencing should not be reduced due to custom reconciliations that have taken place. But that is happening now. It is fine to have the custom ceremony to bring back peace within the family – go ahead and do it, but recognise that it is a crime, and that the custom ceremony is not taking away the crime.

And then there was a long ten-year process of delays and advocacy until the Family Protection Act was finally passed by Parliament.

What was the seed of the idea for the rural-based Committee Against Violence Against Women (CAVAWs)? That didn't come from the Fiji model.

That idea was home-grown, from us. We were looking at our work. We had our first 5-day workshop in Port Vila in 1993. We took women from here and there to come for the workshop, especially from Luganville and Port Vila. Then we had a workshop with Luganville women, there were about 30 Church women there, and they were the ones who were in the first CAVAW in Luganville. The other women who came to our workshops were from the rural areas, and they were asking, what about us? So we were thinking about this, and also we were starting to go out to other islands. We ran workshops on Tanna and came back. So this thing just came into my head: all right, so we are going to sit there in Port Vila, so what about these women? Should we have some way that we can do some follow up? Otherwise it is a waste of money, and we don't have links with the women we have been talking to – so why don't we have women there, who will also take on the work, and work with us? So it was those types of thoughts, reflecting on the workshops we had done, and our

interactions with the women there, and the fact that the women victims needed help with counselling and community awareness.

Do you think that reflection came from your previous work with VNCW, and the political work you did around Independence and the Vanua'aku Pati, which was very rural-based? Or because you came from an island and had a rural background yourself?

All these things. In VNCW, we had Area Councils of Women, and Village Councils of Women from that time. I think it might partly come from having those past experiences of VNCW with the Area Councils and establishing and strengthening that structure. That was when Kathy Solomon was Secretary-General of VNCW and I was VNCW President, and we were working together. We had a very strong network of Village, Island and Area Councils of Women. So I suppose there was knowledge and skills that I had about how we could reach out to rural areas.

But I think it was more that I realised the need to be in touch with other rural people, and I wanted them to belong to this movement also. Again, I think it was about the inclusiveness of everybody – and as we discussed the issues, it was also about making sure that those women had access to protection and safety, and information. For VWC, it was more that we saw the need to build our eyes and ears in the community about what violence is going on, who is suffering from it, and giving support to them also. It was much more that we are sitting here in Vila, so how about getting out in the communities and getting them to have access to our services also? You can go and run a workshop, but if you come back to sit in Vila, then what is the benefit?

Lessons about strategy:

- VWC had a bottom-up approach, and were reaching out to rural women from the beginning, wanting to hear their views and experiences, and for them to have the opportunity to become part of this new movement for women's rights
- CAVAWs were a home-grown strategy, designed to increase the impact and sustainability of VWC's work in rural areas
- CAVAWs always focused on prevention, as well providing referrals back to VWC and branches, and direct assistance to clients where possible

So it was about the sustainability of the work and the information that VWC was bringing into the community, and about growing VWC using the knowledge and experience that I already had. That is why when people from other Pacific countries ask me about setting up CAVAWs, I say: "Only when it suits your country." Don't just copy, modify for your own country.

"We saw the need to build our eyes and ears in the community about what violence is going on, who is suffering from it, and giving support to them also." ...

"When people from other Pacific countries ask me about setting up CAVAWs, I say: 'Only when it suits your country'. Don't just copy, modify for your own country."

What type of support did you have in the early days – locally, regionally and internationally?

At that time, even though there was support from leaders in authority, including people in power at all levels – traditional, Government, churches and women – the men were not supportive. The leaders gave us the tick, but they didn't care how it went. Let's not think that because they were men, that they automatically accepted the issue or thought much about what it all meant. Like the Family Protection Act (FPA) for example – they approved it in Parliament, but didn't do anything to

implement it for many years. The implementation was led by VWC for a long time. After the FPA was passed, the police were not implementing it. They allowed us to be there, it got to the CRP, it looked good on paper, but there was no money from the Government. They were not really committing, our Government hasn't owned the issue – and this is the same up until recently.

FWCC was very supportive and we were in contact with them all the time. They were the sole people with expertise and experience back then, and they were effective. They were just like next door, and we ran to them and cried and laughed and shared. And there were supporters like you and Sabet Cox, through Beneath Paradise.^x And the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women was already established, so we never felt alone. FWCC was always there for us. They made regular contact and visits to VWC, and shared policies, skills and information. We talked about cases, and also about what we were experiencing as wives. While we were doing this work, there were other things happening to us also.

"FWCC was always there for us. ... they shared policies, skills information. We talked about cases, and also what we were experiencing as wives."



Back left to right: Elizabeth Mermer, Shamima Ali (FWCC Coordinator), Edwina Kotoisuva (then FWCC Education Officer), Marilyn Tahi, and Maie Biagk (seated)

I was loving doing my work, and I was fortunate because I had promised myself not to go back to Government work. I left Government because there had been a Vote of No Confidence (the first ever), so I left when that happened. Plus I had had enough of that, and wanted to do the NGO work. I was President of VNCW, and President of the Vanuatu Association of NGOs (VANGO), and helped to re-establish VANGO. I was committed to civil society, and saw its importance to building a strong country, and so was Elizabeth Mermer. We were the only ones working in the desert in the country, there was very little help from leaders then, such as Chiefs and Church leaders.

I had the regional support, and personal support. And then you just have to read and learn and listen. At other meetings, I went to learn – such as other forums on associated issues, meetings held by civil society organisations (CSOs), and FWCC always gave opportunities to learn and build capacity.

I suppose we were finding our way around, and there was no-one else nationally with expertise. But I was ready to share and work with people like the Director of Women's Affairs. They were also wanting to work with me – they sought information from me, and looked up to me for some expert advice. Nationally, people like Grace Molisa were around and she was always supportive, and Roslyn Tor, who was the Director for Women's Affairs and was on the VWC Management Committee later on. She came to consult with Rolenas Lolo and me often, especially when she wanted to set up VANWODS, because she knew that Rolenas and I had been to the East Sepik province of PNG to see how to set up a small credit scheme and we had tried to set it up in Vila. Hilda Lini was always there and I could talk to her, and other women from the Independence struggle era.

But otherwise, I felt like in this job, in the position of Coordinator, I was trying to find my way around on my own, while also listening to and learning from a lot of people regionally. From 1999 it was learning from people like you and Shamima Ali, but before that it was a bit scary, because you had to find strategies that you hadn't heard from other people, because we were in an area where it seemed you were almost alone. Thank goodness the international donor NGOs (INGOs) just came around the last corner recently.

How do you mean? Do you think it would have been harder to establish VWC if the INGOs had come in then?

Yes, that.

Lessons about strategy:

- In Vanuatu, VWC benefitted from a support network of strong women leaders, who had already broken new ground in government and in the NGO sector
- Regionally, FWCC had established and nurtured the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women, a forum for sharing learning skills, policies and information, and for feminist solidarity
- Nationally and regionally, there were very few international agencies working on this issue – most had not yet been convinced of the scale and impact of VAW – this provided space for local civil society to set its own agenda, and identify strategies most suited to local context

What were the main challenges you faced, and how did you get through them?

Money was a challenge. In 1994 we had 12 months funding and then 18 months funding with IWDA as managing agent. I appreciated that IWDA were there for us. It was good that we had someone to pull our hand from 1994 to 1999. It was good because it was a learning of donor culture. By 1999, I was feeling more comfortable – but FWCC was always there, I could fall back on them and talk to them. And because FWCC had been there for us all the time, I could tell IWDA that I thought there was someone else who could be the managing agent now, because we understood each other.

Why did you want to move to FWCC as managing agent?

They understood us much better, and the donor-recipient thing was not there. The IWDA people were lovely, such as Sue Finucane and Avega Bishop – I didn't feel that they were over me, but FWCC understood everything more. And some of our money was going to IWDA for their costs to manage our funding. For me, back then, I didn't know who else was there, and I knew IWDA and felt comfortable working with them because of the Beneath Paradise project^{xi}. AusAID agreed to go with

FWCC as managing agent. AusAID trusted another Pacific NGO, which was another thing that I was very happy about.

So from mid-1999, we moved from a donor to a sister organisation, and there was more equality in that. It seemed like we just bonded, and with you (Juliet) coming on board it was a super thing for us also, because we never had anything that would stop our work. How you shared, and how Edwina Kotoisuva from FWCC shared during our progress reporting workshops – you were both pulling us up. We were not learning with IWDA, but with FWCC and you, we learned skills and were doing things differently.

Do you want to say anything more about the influence of the Beneath Paradise project?

Beneath Paradise in the lead up to Beijing taught us many things – such as even how to use the computer, and it was when we got to know you, Juliet. I was a rural woman, but even after twenty years in Government, that was when I learned to use a computer. I found sisterhood from Beneath Paradise, I found people who liked what I did, like my poems, and I realised that I had those qualities also. That made me happy because people appreciated my poems. I told my personal story and wrote my poem on domestic violence then^{xii}. I learned skills such as how to do posters and photography, and continued to use all that I had learned in my work.

Beneath Paradise enabled Pacific women to document their lives and experiences, and those of other women in their communities. Violence against women emerged as a critical issue impacting women across all areas of social, political and economic life.



Representatives from Beneath Paradise at the NGO Forum held alongside the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women, with IWDA staff and Anne S. Walker (middle back)

I learned more on violence against women from Beneath Paradise too, because it expanded my understanding of how it was in everything. Those were the years when violence against women jumped on to the agenda. It wasn't there so strongly before that, and people now have to understand that. In the Pacific, and globally, the discussion was more focused on women's human

rights at that time. For us, Beneath Paradise strengthened me more to know that, hey it is not Vanuatu alone. It made me feel stronger, and it was an inclusive process. There was solidarity – we were there to work on something together.

I hope that people who are doing this kind of work now, I hope they understand that this work started coming up slowly, and that there were other people pushing and pushing it forward. Beneath Paradise had an impact on everyone, and it was bottom-up, and people went back and kept working on things.^{xiii} Unlike now, when a donor comes to tell you that they have this money, and you can do this or that with it. That is a failure in the way funding is given now. Back then, we did this work because we wanted to do it, not because we were pushed to do it, or because someone said I will give you money to do this. So it came from within back then, and we fully owned our own work.

I would just love us now to look back, and ask where is the work on violence against women now? We pushed these things up, and I hope people understand that. The seeds have grown now, and there are a lot more people coming in now, so I hope we get an opportunity when new people come in to say: sorry, we did that already, we tried that already.

What were the biggest challenges you faced in these early years: was it fear of violence yourself from the perpetrators, was it the way people treated you when you went out in the communities, was it rejection? Or was it all or none of those things?

Finding a suitable space to do the counselling was a big challenge, and the threat of eviction, along with funding.

Otherwise, from the beginning, because of our commitment and strong conviction, we were never rejected anywhere with our community education, up until today. I am not sure why – it may be our diplomacy – doing it with the people, the community development approach. Before we go into a community, the Chief has to agree, and we need to work closely with him or the church leader and the women. Some Chiefs do say no, but we go back again and again. We try to use culture positively – to benefit us. We worked with Chiefs from day one because we knew we needed them to be able to go in and share our messages. For example, providing *nasara* has a lot of weight, even though it is a tiny amount of money. As soon as they receive that payment, they will respect it, and they won't chase you out. That is culture, wherever you go to someone's place, respect it. We have to work with them, there is no option, so let us involve them, and observe those cultural protocols.

“... people who are doing this kind of work now, I hope they understand that this work started coming up slowly, and that there were other people pushing and pushing it forward. ...

That is a failure in the way funding is given now. Back then, we fully owned our own work. ...

“I hope we get an opportunity when new people come in to say: sorry, we did that already, we tried that already.”

Lessons about strategy:

- VWC used culture positively: observing and respecting long-standing cultural protocols – such as the payment of *nasara* – enabled VWC to raise very difficult issues in communities for the first time
- VWC recognised the need to work closely with Chiefs from the very beginning, with the aim of making them allies in the elimination of VAWC
- All this was done without compromising respect or commitment to human rights
- A strong community development bottom-up approach was also key to being accepted by community leaders
- When VWC's approaches to work in communities is rejected by Chiefs, they always go back and try again

There was fear in the early days, but we need to march on, no matter what. This is how we felt – it’s something new, let’s promote it, take care of it, let’s go for it and achieve it. It’s for the benefit of the women, we want their protection, we want them to be safe. And so we just opened the doors. When men asked why not help them, we said you have your *nakamals*, we women don’t have anything. We tried to explain our work nicely and clearly to them, so that they understand. But I think we were ready, when we said yes we are going to go with this, and we knew the Government was with us, and we just went for it. We opened the doors, and women came. It was tough, but we went on with it. Tough meaning we were learning new skills and getting new knowledge, but we wanted to do it, and we were learning. And our Collective was with us, and plenty of women came in to ask if they can help in whatever way.

“There was fear in the early days, but we need to march on, no matter what. ... We opened the doors, and women came.”

Vanuatu Women’s Centre Milestones: the early days, 1992-1999^{xiv}

10-28 August 1992	First Pacific Regional Workshop on Women and Violence, organised by the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre, attended by 3 ni-Vanuatu women: Marilyn Tahī, Elizabeth Mermer (representing the Mautfer Council of Women) and Janet Saksak (Crime Prevention Unit, Port Vila, Vanuatu Police Force)
2nd September 1992	Vanuatu Women’s Centre Collective established at a meeting held at the Hotel Rossi, Port Vila, during a planning and feedback meeting on the Pacific Regional Workshop to the Port Vila Town Council of Women.
September 1992	First office of the Vanuatu Women’s Centre (VWC) set up in one room at Independence Park allocated by the Vanuatu Government Women’s Affairs Unit, with Marilyn Tahī and Elizabeth Mermer working as volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 9 women received counselling and assistance in the first 3 months
25 November - 10 December 1992	First time for Vanuatu to mark the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence, only one year after this campaign was launched in 1991 by the Centre for Women’s Global Leadership. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hand-made posters with messages on domestic violence and violence against women were displayed at the French Embassy – the first messages of their kind in Vanuatu. ▪ First 5-day workshop to educate community members about the issue held with Port Vila women
1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First celebration of International Women’s Day in Vanuatu on 8 March ▪ VWC moved to new office premises, also at Independence Park, rent-free from the Vanuatu Government ▪ First workshop held in Luganville with rural, Port Vila and Luganville women ▪ Maie Biagk joins Marilyn Tahī and Elizabeth Mermer as a Counsellor – all 3 are volunteers until the first funding is provided in 1994 ▪ Work begins on the <i>Beneath Paradise</i> project^{xv} funded by International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) with VWC playing a major part ▪ Self-defence course for women run in April ▪ Awareness-raising activities begun, including community talks, radio programs, printing T-shirts, Thursdays in Black^{xvi}
1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First counsellor training workshop held in Vanuatu in April, including roleplays on basic counselling skills, cultural issues and counselling supervision, facilitated by Andy Lynch and Marilyn Tahī ▪ First brochures developed on VWC services with assistance from Andy Lynch, funded by the French Embassy and British High Commission ▪ First Committee Against Violence Against Women (CAVAW) set up in Luganville ▪ Tua Theatre established by VWC to help spread effective messages during community awareness sessions in villages and settlements

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VWC hosts the 2nd workshop in Port Vila for the <i>Beneath Paradise</i> project^{xvii}, which prepares women from across the Pacific region to travel to the Beijing 4th World Conference on Women and NGO Forum in 1995^{xviii} ▪ First funding from the Australian Government aid program, with IWDA as the managing agent for VWC's funding
1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sanma Counselling Centre opens its doors on 10 August, VWC's first provincial branch, with funding from the New Zealand Government ▪ Safehouse services offered to women, also with funding from New Zealand ▪ Natu Lily appointed as the first safehouse counsellor ▪ VWC workshop for International Women's Day starts a petition to the Vanuatu Government to ratify CEDAW before the Beijing 4th World Conference on Women ▪ At a joint celebration with VNCW for National Women's Day in May, Minister Sethy Regenvanu officiates at VWC's offices, and announces that he will table the ratification of CEDAW in Parliament before the Vanuatu Government delegation leaves for the Beijing 4th World Conference on Women^{xix}
1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2nd CAVAW set up at Isangel on Tanna ▪ Police Sexual Offences Unit established after lobbying by VWC ▪ First 3-year funding granted by the Australian Government, through IWDA ▪ VWC registers formally as an NGO under Vanuatu law ▪ VWC now has 2 paid Counsellors – Maie Biagk and Louise Nauka
1997	<p>Government begins the Comprehensive Reform Program (CRP) process, with VWC, VNCW and the National Workers Union on the CRP Social Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The CRP Social Committee recommends domestic violence legislation to the Council of Ministers, and the recommendation is accepted
1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First draft of the Family Protection Act – VWC comments and recommends changes, and lobbying for the passing of the legislation continues until 2008 ▪ Tafea domestic violence workshop held at Isangel, and a decision is made to establish a new branch for the province
1999	<p>Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) becomes the managing agent for Australian Aid funding to VWC, after VWC has a participatory workshop with staff and external stakeholders to design its first 3-year Program Design Document in May, with FWCC's Edwina Kotoisuva as Project Manager and Juliet Hunt as consultant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The program design builds on FWCC's learning and best practice by having co-ordinated and multi-faceted strategies combining counselling, community awareness-raising/prevention, legal advocacy, and the establishment of CAVAWs

Expanding the reach and the services (2000 – 2010)

You have listed many milestones during these years – advocacy for the FPA, the passing of the legislation, the establishment of TCC, and the prevalence research. Are there other achievements you want to talk about?

Strengthening of VWC management was a main achievement of those years with FWCC. We began in 1992, so by then we were getting a little bit more mature. But there was a need to strengthen the management, a need to look back into our policies, our management style, and strengthen things like program management, the Program Coordination Committee and the Management Committee. At this time it was something I felt, that we were looking back into ourselves, and really asking, have we got these things in place?

We wanted to make sure the financial management was right, with the money no longer coming through IWDA. In this period, the funds first came through FWCC, and then directly to us. During that time, all these things helped to strengthen and build DFAT's trust in VWC, giving us that opportunity to manage ourselves, with FWCC there to hold our hands and FWCC's Deputy Coordinator Edwina Kotoisuva making regular visits each year. With you Juliet being there, we were doing the Program Design Documents (PDD) properly, whereas we were not doing anything like that in the past with IWDA. We were sharpening ourselves, our skills with our planning, Annual Plans, Progress Reports and things like that. That whole thing, we didn't have that in the past, and it was capacity building in those managing roles. We had the PDD, and we had to follow it, we had to report on it, we were starting to talk about monitoring and evaluation, we were starting to look at recording our progress, and reflecting on what we had achieved and not achieved – whereas before that, we were just doing our work and not recording what our successes and progresses were.



Marilyn on the steps of the old office at the Sandra Building, Nambatu (photo credit: AusAID)

*“Talking about our achievements opened up our heads. ...
We really began to ask ourselves, are we achieving our long-term goals?”*

Talking about our achievements opened up our heads. In the past, we were still growing ourselves, but now we had grown, we were now looking back and asking, what have we achieved now? And we really began to ask ourselves, are we achieving our long-term goals and long-term aims? Now we were looking at strategic planning with you, and we didn't know that before, we hadn't heard of that before, and it was starting to make sense why we needed to go through all those processes and things. I think that is one thing about VWC – we were able to look back and say what we achieved then. I don't know whether other organisations were able to do this. We weren't just doing our work every day, but were looking for progress and achievements and reflecting on them.

That process of strategic planning was about actually taking control of accountability for yourself, and lifting up the reflection out of the day-to-day.

Yes, that is what I mean. It made us mindful of accountability, including our financial acquittals and financial management, including strengthening our efforts in that area by training Lisa Laban (who started with VWC as Finance Officer), and making sure of our auditing. I think those kinds of things in an organisation help to build the organisation.

When you did that strategic planning, FWCC were there only as advisors, not leaders.

Yes, we were setting our own agenda and working together. I think that is one of the beauties of that process, whereas before when we were with IWDA, we were still learning, so we were looking up. Whereas you and Edwina Kotoisuva and FWCC were more holding our hands. And honestly talking and saying no we can't do that, or yes we can do that, and giving reasons. So this gave us a better understanding of the donor culture, and what the contract meant and why it is important to do the PDD first. It made it better and nicer to understand why we had to do all those things, and if we want this money, these are the things that we need to do to be accountable – such as the Annual Plans, Progress Reports, financial acquittals, audits, completion reports, concept papers, collecting data monthly, and having reviews by the donor. And FWCC was there for those times, but really as a big friend and as a big sister of FWCC, and sharing their experiences. Of course, we also had the technical advantage of having you around with us.

*"We were setting our own agenda, and working together. ...
During that time, I was thinking more about the mission and objectives of VWC, and linking this to staffing and accountability to survivors, and to the donors."*

From my side, I know in that sort of work, I always tried (I don't know whether I succeeded) to share the reasons – not just, you have to do this and that, but why it was needed for the donor, and more importantly why it was needed and useful for the organisation itself. I tried to say 'no, you are not just doing this for the donor, are you doing this for yourself?' So I was striving to get people to take ownership of those processes, and make them more meaningful.

Yes, that was it – it was becoming clearer – not only what you need before you can get the funding, but what you need to make your organisation grow, and achieve this aim of ending violence against women and children in the country. If you need their money, you have to also have this, and you cannot be frustrated, you have to have these kind of things, and that is part of the game. I think that is the time when, for me at least, I had my crash course on the survival of the organisation. If we want to achieve our aims when we set up VWC, to serve the survivors in this country, then we had to receive some things on a bed of rocks, you have to give up some feelings. So if you didn't want some things from the donor, you had to agree to it. During that time, I was thinking more about the mission and objectives of VWC, and linking this to staffing and accountability to survivors, and to the donors. This was a hard task for a coordinator or leader of an organisation.

I remember when one donor representative came, it was in the middle of this time we are discussing, and she had lots of questions about the program design document. I remember you were very diplomatic, but quite concerned at the way she questioned you – whether this is the best way, or what about this way, and will this thing happen. But she didn't insist on changes, and they did trust you to set your strategic direction yourself. There were feminists in there supporting you. So they would ask questions, and you always listened and genuinely considered, but you also knew

you had a right to stand your ground and explain why things should be done in the way you proposed.

Yes, we were able to make them understand. At that time also, somehow there was a mentality that if you have a good program, so the donor should fund it. But now, you find out that yes, you do have a good program, but the donor will not necessarily fund it, because they have their own agenda. But at that time, I felt like they were listening, whereas I had fears all along about that, whether they would listen to us and take us seriously. But they did.

Should we analyse why they took you seriously then? What do you think?

Donors didn't treat us as equals immediately, but we built that up during that time with FWCC. And I think part of that may be because FWCC had status. They knew FWCC's work already, and I suppose that they listened to Shamima Ali, and maybe she was advocating on our behalf.

Do you think it was also because you were doing a good job? You were able to show them the results.

Yes, I think so, that contributed a lot. We followed our plans, and when we didn't do something we explained why. We were able to show them our results, how we were building on our earlier achievements, and we showed them that we were solid. We didn't change our goal, even though they wanted us to at one point. We explained that our goal doesn't have to change each phase, and that is one strength of VWC, that we haven't changed it. But we also reflected on what was working and what was not.

How do you see the expansion and growth during the ten years from 2001 to 2010?

Growth was gradual. We were strategically thinking how and where we could grow. We are down here in Efate, so first we wanted to open a branch in Sanma in the second town to look after the north. So then what next? A request came from Tafea. People were talking about it, that there was a lot of violence there. We went and did a workshop first with them, and we had a CAVAW down there already at Isangel. In their work over 2-3 years, we ran a workshop for the women of Tafea at a little school down there. And during the workshop a request came for a branch from the women. We didn't open the branch down there until 2004. Before that, Isangel CAVAW was doing small work, as volunteers and with few resources.

Lessons about strategy: growth

- VWC steadfastly maintained that its goal was the elimination of violence against women (EVAW) even when donors argued that each new funding phase should identify a new goal
- **Growth in the program and organisation was gradual, phased and strategic, building on and learning from previous successes, and took into account the limits of staff capacity**
- There was ongoing and serious reflection on what was working, and what was not, with modifications to increase effectiveness and adapt to the local context
- Donor support allowed for some flexibility in programming, which enabled greater effectiveness in adjusting to changing circumstances and ongoing learning
- **VWC was always clear that funding was for the organisation to implement a national program, and resisted assumptions that the work could be seen as a short-term "donor project"**
- Sustainable results were demonstrated and regularly documented
- Gradual growth, learning and the ability to sustain and build on results **would not have been possible without long-term support from donors, particularly from the Australian and New Zealand Government aid programs, which demonstrated trust and a commitment to partnership**

We were happy with Santo looking after the north and Tanna in the south for the time being. That was also strategic because of the money. And then we gradually built up the CAVAWs here and there before getting more branches – also because of the funding. And then we said, OK SCC can take responsibility for training the Penama and Torba CAVAWs with VWC doing more with CAVAWs in the south. Because of our capacity, we had to go gradually, and build our staffing up. At that time, it was only or mainly me doing all the community education at VWC.

So this was a period of reach and going out, and we were growing and strengthening the CAVAWs. A lot of effort was put into the CAVAWs then, mainly from me, because we wanted to have that reach into the communities and get to the women in the islands, and provide awareness on the issues to the communities. They were totally voluntary at first, with no honorariums.



VWC staff and participants at a CAVAW training in Santo, 2006

How important was it that the growth was gradual? I am asking because there was a lot of emphasis on the importance of scaling up in development.

We didn't set up any new branches during this period, but we went out, slowly and gradually. So there are two things. One is that we always know that we are an organisation (and not just a donor project), and the second is that we have this program on violence against women and children. But we didn't have enough money, we didn't have a lot of cash sitting in the bank account. So you have to do it gradually and sensibly. We could have set up everything quickly, but you need resources, money and human beings and physical structures, and it is not easy. It has taken us over twenty years to do that, and thank goodness we still had DFAT giving us that money – but if not, we couldn't have done all that.



Torba Chiefs attend a VWC workshop on violence against women in 2007

So do you think there was any benefit in having a gradual growth, or was it more about resources?

There was a benefit in terms of learning. Sometimes we did feel held back by lack of money, but there was a benefit in terms of capacity. From the beginning we had Elizabeth Mermer, and then Maie Biagk and then Louise Nauka as Counsellors, and Lily Natu Tawari was at the safehouse. Louise and Natu started as volunteers. But there were not many people around then that you could even get – human resources were so difficult, and often it felt like me alone. So you had to stop and think: do you want to do that with your 5 fingers or 10 fingers? No you can't do everything. You need people physically. In Santo of course we had Kathy Mabon and Annie Philemon and Carol Martin and SCC only had 3 staff for a long time. Finding the right people was a challenge back then and is still an issue. It is even harder to find suitable staff on the islands with the education and skills needed.



VWC's National CAVAW training in Port Vila, April 2008: VWC always used a participatory approach, and invited stakeholders such as police to be a part of the process

Maie Biagk was a church counsellor before coming to VWC, and tried her best. Janet Saksak Boedovo was always there with us, but she had her job with the police. Moving gradually was the best thing for us. And then there was the justification. After the prevalence survey, we thought oh, we must go here and there, and this province and that province is so high in prevalence. We could have just gone and set up here and there, but what are you going to do there, and how much are you going to be operating there? So then after the survey, we looked at it and thought, OK, we should expand further. That's when we thought about Torba because it was so far, and then Malampa because of the very high prevalence, and also Penama. It was always difficult to find buildings to house branches on the islands.

Can you say more about the first prevalence survey in Vanuatu on VAWC, and why you did that?

We did the survey because we felt that we wanted to know what is out there. We wanted to know the incidence and prevalence, and we really wanted to do it as a baseline. Also, because our work was growing and expanding, we wanted to know the situation. And by then we had all those CAVAWs also, a strong network throughout the islands.

Using the CAVAWs as interviewers was a real strength of your approach to the prevalence survey. Another strength was that you adapted the survey instrument to Vanuatu, but without adapting it too much. You added some other questions that were relevant to Vanuatu. The CAVAWs did a good job, and they were committed.

Yes, and we had the staff to back them up on each provincial survey team. It was the first big survey for VWC since setting up, and we wanted to know the data. Firstly, we had to decide where to conduct the survey, and we wanted the whole country. Secondly, we needed good people for interviewing women in the team, and thirdly we needed the Chiefs to agree for us to go in and do our interviewing. The Government supported us through the Vanuatu National Statistics Office (VNSO) and the Department of Women's Affairs. Our fieldwork team were the CAVAWs, staff and former staff because they already knew about the issue of violence against women. Otherwise it would have taken much longer to train the fieldwork team to carry out the survey.



VWC staff and consultant at a planning meeting in 2008 for the VWC prevalence survey with the Vanuatu National Statistics Office

It was a feminist way to do the research – to use the staff and CAVAWs, and use it a learning experience. You wanted to do the survey in every province (which was not the usual way), and you were right – because you knew that if you couldn't prove to the Provincial and Area Councils and Chiefs that this was the result from their province, that may not believe it.

Yes, they could say, this is us – they couldn't deny it. We had you there to work with us, and that is another thing. When we went into that survey, we had our own people – people who understood the work, the job, the issue, feminist, and FWCC was there by our side. Especially that we had you guiding us through that survey – planning, training, assessing, analysing and report-writing. We did ours before anyone else, apart from Kiribati and Solomon Islands.^{xx}

Looking back at it, we are happy that we did it, because at least Vanuatu has a baseline. Because when we came to establish VWC and begin our work, there was nothing we could look back on. You know, we were going around to the Government to establish the centre, and we didn't have anything to say: see how many cases we have. In those first years, we couldn't get any data from the police, because they didn't have any. There was no information anywhere on violence against women and children and domestic violence in Vanuatu. One big thing that people can remember VWC for is that survey.

"We had a reason to do the prevalence survey. ... I wanted community leaders to know what we found, I wanted them to know that there is an issue in this country ... When you have a women's organisation leading research like this, the findings just keep on being used, because we carry through with the commitment."

Another strength was the analysis. It was not the analysis of an outsider. The report provides the analysis of that whole team, it was a participatory team analysis. That is a feminist way to do it too.

I will agree there because on the other surveys, that was a bit of a missing link. Also, the way that we took it back to the provinces, and told them about it. We had a reason to do this – I wanted them to know what we found, I wanted them to know that there is an issue in this country, if they didn't know before. We wanted them to know so that they could do something about it. So we went out to tell everybody about it, because of how we felt about the issue, our commitment. The Government here has to take it on board and do something and believe in it.

When you have a women's organisation leading research like this, the findings just keep on being used, because we carry through with the commitment. For us here, when I talk to the staff, and in our trainings with other organisations, we need to talk about the survey first. You have to talk about the survey findings all the time. You have to keep on using and mentioning the survey data as evidence that it is a problem in this country, and get their support. Often, these people do not know. It is a strategy that we have found to be successful. We made the country know about domestic violence from those results because we went out to the provinces. Doing it with the Vanuatu National Statistics Office (VNSO) also was important and gave it authority.

Lessons about strategy: research

Approaches used to implement the national prevalence survey on VAW were effective:

- VWC worked in close collaboration with the Vanuatu National Statistics Office from the outset
- Members of CAVAWs with commitment and knowledge of the issue of violence against women were trained to undertake the fieldwork, with the support of VWC staff at the branches
- The sample included every major island and province, so that provincial results could be shared with community leaders and provincial government, which proved to be an effective advocacy approach
- A participatory approach was used with key VWC research team members to analyse and make sense of the findings
- The findings of the survey continue to be disseminated to this day



Training the VWC prevalence research team, March 2009

What type of support did you have during this period of expansion, and was this different from the very early days when you were establishing the service? Were you getting any support from different places during this phase?

We had the NZ government supporting us with SCC, from 1995 to 2012. During all this time they also supported the safehouse services. They were very respectful and worked very well with us. These funds came from New Zealand through the Vanuatu Government.

"We had the NZ Government supporting us with SCC ... and safehouse services. They were very respectful and worked very well with us."

Vanuatu Government support was also there, but not in terms of money. They were starting to recognise that we are doing something of importance to the nation. They knew us, and they involved us in committees like the national CEDAW and CRC committees, and sent us off to New York for some of the meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Maybe they recognised me, but they recognised the organisation also. The greater recognition of VWC boosted our lobbying around the Family Protection Act. They also agreed for VNSO to work with us on the survey.

FWCC continued to give a lot of solidarity, and also knowledge sharing and providing opportunities – in terms of regional meetings, and also including us in regional and international forums, with them or by ourselves. Also they encouraged us to be on the board of the Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development (APWLD), and other things like that.



VWC's Third National Conference on Violence Against Women was held in December 2008 during the 16 Days of Activism Campaign, with 36 CAVAW members, 5 male advocates, 2 Branch Project Officers, and VWC Trustee the late Mrs Hanson Matas Kelekele

That was also when you got that award from the United States Government – was that important, did it make a difference?

That was the Woman of Courage award, in 2009. I'm quiet about that, because the U.S. gave it, which was good – but they didn't give funding or other support. The Peace Corps and the U.S. Embassy in PNG worked with us for a short time. I am happy that they recognised us, but then that was it, it was cold after that. I have always said that award and the Point of Light^{xxi} was all about

VWC, not me, but I got the award because I was the head of the organisation. The Point of Light was awarded by the British High Commissioner to the Solomon Islands on behalf of the Queen. But what does it mean? If then the U.S. would say – all right, annually you are going to receive money because we recognise the work, and we give you some small thing like \$1000 a year for something. It is not that I am money-hungry, but there was no money or solidarity. And sometimes they give the award to people who I don't think they should. I think the Department of Women's Affairs should advise them on who to recognise in this way.

Did the values or direction of the organisation change in this expansion phase, in any way?

Taking on the research was a change, it was a new strategy. At the beginning of this work, research was not something that was anywhere in our mind. So this was part of the evolution of our work. At the very beginning, we wanted to do counselling, then very soon after in the first year we added community education. We soon saw that we needed safehouse services, mobile counselling outreach and legal services, and later the male advocacy training and program (see the next section for more details on the male advocacy program). After the research findings came out, we needed to work hard to establish more branches.



Left: Awareness-raising on the Family Protection Act, Ambae, 2010; right: Ambae male leaders' workshop in 2010

What were the main challenges you faced during these expansionary years, and how did you get through them?

Staff capacity we mentioned already. We didn't have any permanent office, only rental premises. I cannot say that we had a lack of money, but we were always waiting for the 4th or 5th year and saying, are they going to give us money again, or not? And that worry is still with us.

Some of the challenges from the donor side were in their review remarks on our PDD, and changes they wanted. They were always asking why we are not working with VNCW. At one stage it was a big hoo haa for nothing, even VNCW said so – because we have always been working with them. But it didn't stop our work, nothing stopped our work. But the donor reviewers should have learned more first, before they made these types of comments.

Challenges:

At the end of each funding phase, we were always saying "are they going to give us money again, or not? And that worry is still with us." ...

"But it didn't stop our work, nothing stopped our work."

What about backlash or resistance in those middle years before the research? Did you have many people pushing back really strongly?

These are the years where I think that thing was on our head about traditional leaders and church leaders. There were no major things, but our CAVAWs were saying that the Chiefs are not responding, the Chiefs are saying no to CAVAWs visiting to raise awareness, and things like that during these years. We knew that issue was there and that they were not supportive, maybe because they didn't understand the issue of violence against women and children. But once we actually got in there and we were able to talk to them, they were OK, they would understand us, and we knew we should continue to work with them. If anyone doesn't want us, leave it, and next time we go back again and try again.

These were the times when we knew we had to still push for acceptance of VWC and of the issue being real. VNCW was undermining sometimes, but I never felt it was very big, it was more a few individuals who said, why have a different organisation. But we were always members of VNCW, as a women's organisation.

Some of the church women were a bit territorial. They thought, why is VWC addressing this issue? They thought it should be the churches' role to deal with family issues. They didn't understand the issue of VAWC, but that is how they felt. It seemed to me that we, meaning the women of this country, we were learning our place on the different issues. The church women didn't know what domestic violence was, they didn't recognise it as violence against women. They accepted that it was OK for the man to beat her, and to treat her this way. They believed that way, they preached that way, and they also lived that way – it was subordination to the man as the head of the household.

"The Chiefs were saying no to CAVAWs to raise awareness ... But once we actually got in there and we were able to talk to them, they were OK, they would understand us, and we knew we should continue to work with them. If anyone doesn't want us, leave it, and next time we go back again and try again." ...

"Some people did not believe in us, and that went on until the research report was published in 2011. That was a turning point for us, when people really started to believe in the quality and effectiveness of our work."



Separate workshops held with male and female community leaders in 2002/2003 at Bigbay, Santo

Some people did not believe in us, and that went on until the research report was published in 2011. That was a turning point for us, when people really started to believe in the quality and effectiveness of our work. The Honourable Ham Lini Vanuaroroa was Prime Minister at the time, and he launched the report at Le Lagon Hotel.

Do you want to say any more about how you modified the approaches and learning shared by FWCC?

We took on the FWCC model and tried to modify it, but we believed in those principles of human rights, feminism and collective decision-making. I suppose if it was somebody who didn't believe in those principles, they would find it difficult. But we agreed to those principles, we believed in them, and we wanted to use them and we made sure that we did.

For counselling, we didn't really modify. For community education, the messages were the same, but we needed to find a way to build it into the environment where it would be successful. But we took on the principles. And that is because VAWC happens in a similar way anywhere you go, in a group, village, island or country. But also we believe that you modify where appropriate.

"We took on the FWCC model and tried to modify it, but we believed in those principles of human rights, feminism and collective decision-making. ...

... the messages were the same, but we needed to find a way to build it into the environment where it would be successful. ...

And that it because violence against women and children happens in a similar way anywhere you go, in a group, village, island or country."



16 Days of Activism Campaign against Violence Against Women, 2009

What about attendance at custom courts? I remember Louise Nauka speaking at custom court hearings?

Custom courts were very useful in the beginning. Our Counsellors Maie Biagk and Louse Nauka used these, and they were very beneficial for our clients. Taking cases to custom courts faded slowly away, because we were more focused on legal protection. Back then, the legal protection wasn't strong. But when the legal protection became stronger, with Domestic Violence Protection Orders and the Family Protection Orders (under the FPA), that is when that practice reduced, and we are not doing that any more. In 2001, the Courts agreed to Court Rule Number 67 on domestic violence, and started to provide Domestic Violence Protection Orders. By that time, the Courts were

becoming more aware of domestic violence because of VWC's work, including the cases we were taking to court.

It was the women themselves making that choice to go to custom court, and you were respecting that choice and helping them. Did you break down some barriers with this practice?

The women were wanting it at that early time because they believed in their Chiefs, and believed that this was the only way to solve any problems. Even getting the custom courts to allow the case to go to them was some progress, because many Chiefs didn't allow it, and we didn't get any referrals that way. So if the Chiefs did allow a custom court hearing, it was already a breakthrough. But this never undermined the commitment to the legal side of it as a crime. The police were not taking up cases much, by using the Penal Code. Eventually the FPA was approved in 2008.

Because we saw that the legal protection was not strong, during those years was when we started to think about having our own Legal Officer. We were finding that the police and private lawyers were not helping as much as we would like. So that was also a modification from the FWCC approach, to have a Lawyer to handle cases. Back in the very early days (before FWCC was managing agent) we had an Australian volunteer Lawyer Merrin Mason for one year. She was a friend of Andy Lynch. Our first Lawyer, Lynffer Wini Maltungtung was appointed in February 2003.



Australian Governor-General Dame Quentin Bryce visits VWC during her visit to Vanuatu for the 30th Anniversary of Vanuatu's Independence, 2010

Vanuatu Women's Centre Milestones: expanding reach and services, 2000-2010^{xxii}

2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VWC appoints its first Mobile Counsellor (Janet Pakoa), and extends mobile counselling from Port Vila and rural Efate to all islands, offering this service during all community awareness visits ▪ VWC issues a standing invitation to the Vanuatu Police to accompany mobile counselling activities, which always begin with awareness-raising sessions, and VWC begins to participate in Police crime prevention activities ▪ VWC appoints its first Community Educator, Miriam Bule ▪ VWC holds its first National Conference on Domestic Violence
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lotty Kayai begins as a Volunteer Counsellor at Isangel in Tafea Province ▪ VWC invests in 2 week-long child protection trainings for all VWC counselling staff ▪ The Chief Justice introduces Domestic Violence Court Orders in December with Court Rule 67, a result of ongoing lobbying by VWC – VWC assisted 12 women to get DV court orders in the following 6 months ▪ The Vanuatu Government develops its first Domestic Violence Policy ▪ The Presbyterian Church General Assembly in Vanuatu agrees to a decade to combat violence ▪ Marilyn Tahi attends the first regional male advocacy training held in Fiji, facilitated by FWCC
2002	<p>By the end of the first 3-year funding phase in June 2002, VWC had exceeded most of its targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 15 CAVAWs were working in remote regions (compared with a target of 12) ▪ More than 3,300 counselling sessions had been undertaken, including 1,540 with new clients, and 61 clients had been protected through safehouse facilities ▪ More than 15,000 people attended VWC's community education activities, and about two-thirds of these were women and girls <p>FWCC continues as managing agent for 5-year funding from the Australian Aid program from July 2012, and NZAID continues its funding for SCC and safehouse assistance</p>
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tafea Counselling Centre (TCC) opens, VWC's second provincial branch ▪ First male advocacy training held in Vanuatu September, co-facilitated with FWCC, with men from across many sectors: church leaders, media, police, health, education, civil society (Vanuatu Disabled Society and the Family Health Association) and the Department of Finance ▪ VWC's first Legal Officer appointed to assist with legal advocacy and increasing survivors' access to justice ▪ Amendments made to laws on child sexual assault and pornography, partly due to lobbying by VWC
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vanuatu Police Force establishes the first Sexual Offences Unit ▪ 3 male advocacy trainings held, including the first advanced (stage 2) male advocacy training, and one dedicated solely to members of the Vanuatu Police Force (VPF) and Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF) ▪ VWC holds the second national conference on VAW, enabling staff, CAVAWs and other stakeholders to reflect on effective strategies to eliminate VAW
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Male advocacy training held in Sanma province for the first time ▪ VWC staff participate in 2 workshops (2004 and 2005) to develop and trial the FWCC trainer's manual on "Gender Relations, Women's Human Rights and Violence Against Women", which VWC immediately translated into Bislama and adapted for local training workshops
2006	3 CAVAW members from Walaha, Pangi and East Ambae CAVAWs were appointed as Justices for Island Courts
2007	<p>By the end of the 5-year funding phase in June 2007, VWC again exceeded most targets, and had "brought the issue of VAW out from the private sphere"^{xxiii}:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VWC's rural network now included 33 CAVAWs across all provinces ▪ 6 male advocacy trainings had been conducted with 83 men receiving challenging training on their own behaviour, gender equality, human rights and VAW, and more than half of these participated in more than one training session ▪ Legal assistance was extended to rural areas

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestic violence included in police training for new recruits for the first time Some Provincial and Area Councils have begun to work closely with CAVAWs and branches, and to acknowledge VAW as a problem Over 50,000 people participated in VWC, branch and CAVAW community awareness/prevention activities <p>FWCC continues as managing agent for another 5-year funding from the Australian Aid program commencing in July 2007, including a harmonised funding arrangement with NZAID, who continued to fund SCC and safehouse facilities</p>
2008	Parliament passes the Family Protection Act (FPA) after 10 years of advocacy and lobbying by VWC
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In partnership with the Vanuatu National Statistics Office, VWC undertakes fieldwork for the first national prevalence survey on VAW from March to May Following the gazetting of the FPA, VWC begins advocating for its implementation, including for the establishment of an FPA Taskforce; this was established later in the year but did not consistently meet Merilyn Tahi receives the “Women of Courage” award from the US Government
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vanuatu Police Force (VPF) sets up Family Protection Unit in Port Vila Vanuatu Law Reform Commission was established, following lobbying by VWC Seventh Day Adventist Church launched the ENDitNOW campaign against VAW VWC conducted a VAW/CAVAW workshop with the Solomon Islands Christian Association, VWC’s first request to provide training to regional partners



Vanuatu Police Force sets up the Family Protection Unit in Port Vila in 2010



Interviewers in the field collecting data for Vanuatu’s first national prevalence study on VAW in 2019

Growing, achieving momentum, deepening changes (2011 –2020)

We are listing the main achievements of each decade in a table. Would you like to say anything more about them?

Implementation of the FPA was much more during this phase. VWC got its building, although the idea was sitting there for a very long time.

When the survey came around and the results came out, it gave us more strength and muscles to say: now we can go in, we have evidence now for both advocacy and community education. We still had the same one aim to eliminate VAWC, and the same values. But after that, people knew more about us, and it gave us confirmation. So there was a growing awareness, particularly from people in the Government, sitting up and recognising that this problem is real. So I suppose from then on, other people were starting to do a lot of work on VAW – so we had more people around in the field. During this time, one of the important jobs was the dissemination of the prevalence survey findings, as part of our community awareness and as part of holding people accountable. We had evidence now and were asking them to support our work. It was about telling people about the survey, and using it as evidence for our work, at all levels. I was happy that we had done the survey, and had the findings.

From 2012, we no longer needed to have FWCC as the managing agent to receive Australian Aid funds. This is also the period where we had two Australian Ministers for Foreign Affairs visiting the centre (Julie Bishop and Bob Carr), as well as the Governor General of Australia (the Honourable Dame Quentin Bryce), and other Australian delegations. There was high level recognition of VWC and its work, and a sense of acceptance, not having to continually justify that violence against women and children was a problem. We somehow became a star program of DFAT. It was a time when there was a lot of recognition of VWC's work. We have already said that the research played a big role in that recognition.



Merilyn wearing medals presented by the President of Vanuatu, including for the anniversary of the Vanua'aku Pati, and for the 10th and 20th celebrations of Vanuatu's Independence

"There was high level of recognition of VWC and its work, and a sense of acceptance, not having to continually justify that violence against women is a problem. ... We have already said that the research played a big role in that recognition."



Launch of the VWC Research Report at Australia's Parliament House, Canberra, November 2011



Workshops like these occurred in every province and municipality following the publication of VWC's research on violence against women (VWC and VNSO 2011 Vanuatu National Survey on Women's Lives and Family Relationships) to share the findings of the research specific to each province. Key findings were also integrated into all VWC's community awareness/prevention talks, workshops and trainings with male advocates and partners

*Top: Marilyn presents findings to Port Vila municipality Councillors
Bottom: Workshop with Shefa Provincial Government Councillors and staff, showing participants reading the Bislama summary of the research report*

There was also a big focus on partnerships, which is linked to all the breakthroughs made in this period. We had a lot more Chiefs on board, through the male advocacy training and workshops, and other community leaders. During this period we put the community leaders at the centre of our community awareness. It was a specific strategy to target the leaders, now that we had the evidence. We wanted them to be aware of the information and the knowledge. We wanted to get all types of leaders, the police, Government leaders at all levels and in all areas and particularly in education, health

"There was also a big focus on partnerships, which is linked to all the breakthroughs made in this period. ... It was a specific strategy to target ... all type of leaders ... "

and the churches. Health is with us now, and we are beginning to work with education. We focused on both women and men leaders – like Penama Council of Women, Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) women, The Neil Thomas Ministry (NTM) church men and women and youth leaders, Presbyterian women leaders, and workshops targeting island Councils of Chiefs, including Tanna, Ambae, Penama, Torba, Efate and Malekula.



VWC and the Police partnered to provide a workshop with Anglican Youth leaders from North and South Ambae, 2012

Is it correct to say that there was more momentum, and wider and deeper changes during the last ten years?

Yes, during that phase from 2012 to 2016, you know in that PDD workshop, I felt like we have reached the “top of the mountain”, and we are looking down now, over and across, and some people are with us. I didn’t feel like that before. I felt like we were struggling and struggling to climb that mountain. In that last phase, there were new policies from the churches, including the Vanuatu Council of Churches, and there were policies from the Government, such as the police, Department of Women’s Affairs, Prosecutions and courts. We were enjoying our reach into the branches, and saying they are OK, and no-one is chasing them out. So I felt like acceptance and recognition is the top of the mountain, and now we just have to keep that momentum, and keep it stronger and moving. We felt more acceptable and more accepted, because there were more invitations for us to do activities together, in community awareness and training, with more male leaders requesting training, and more working together with them on cases.

“I felt like we had reached the ‘top of the mountain’, and we are looking down now, over and across, and some people are with us. ... there were more invitations for us to do activities together, in community awareness and training, with more male leaders requesting training, and more working together on cases.”



Members of the Nikoletan Council of Chiefs, Tanna, with Police and VWC staff, during an awareness workshop on violence against women, human rights and the Family Protection Act, 2013

What were the challenges during this time?

There was Tropical Cyclone (TC) Pam in 2015. At least we were heard in the Gender and Protection Cluster, we were recognised and we were part of it, although in that sphere or area, we were still building ourselves up on our capacity and knowledge, and we needed to learn and share with our staff. What we learned from TC Pam was that our humanitarian work had just begun – we had to learn more and build our capacity to work more effectively during and after disasters. During this time we recruited a Humanitarian Officer, a former Police Officer.

TC Pam also brought other challenges, with people coming in and setting things up and doing this work without appreciating that we are around. We were starting to feel like it was back to colonial times, that people were looking down on us. There may be a better word for that – it was so overcrowded with other agencies wanting money, and wanting to work in this field also. Our first response was: yes, hello, hello, come, let's plan and work together. But then they come back to say, yes, we want to work with you, but we can't now because there is less money coming, so we cannot work with you. So now, it feels like that pot of money is sliced, with a piece of cake going here, and a piece of cake going there. So the fear is, will we have another phase funded or not?

Challenges:

- *Tropical Cyclone Pam – “we started to feel like it was back to colonial times ... it was so overcrowded with other agencies”*
- *Personal attacks – “this work is not mine, it is for the women of this country.”*
- *Delay in Government implementation of the Family Protection Act – “it took so long for them to take ownership of the issue. ... There seemed an unwillingness to fully implement the contents and provisions of the Family Protection Act.”*

Are there any other challenges you would like to talk about? You have also had a few personal attacks from other women's leaders, but they haven't stopped you.

There's no real spear on me. But if there is a spear, I am ready. This work is not mine, it is for the women of this country. There have been a few personal attacks, but it didn't really influence DFAT, who listened to my explanations. They trusted us. And I cannot get angry about the personal attacks. If they come, I will talk to DFAT about it to sort it out. I am strong.

Another challenge was the delay in Government implementation of the Family Protection Act. The Police established the Family Protection Units, but it was VWC who implemented the legislation by submitting applications to the Courts. But the Government themselves didn't take much action until much later. We had Stretem Rod Blong Jastis (SBRJ) coming in, and then the Courts began to move after some workshops and trainings. And then the Department of Women's Affairs came in later to mark the 16 Days of Activism, with other people and organisations, because the 16 Days campaign is about women – and later on the Government gave responsibility for implementing the legislation to the Department of Justice. Implementation of the Family Protection Act includes the authorised persons being piloted and appointed. Someone senior once asked us, when it took so long to be implemented by the Government: why don't we just take over the authorised person's network?

One thing about this was that I wanted the Government to take interest and include violence against women and children in their programs, but after the FPA came out, it took so long for them to take ownership of this issue. This has begun now, but it is still not enough. For example, the Department of Women's Affairs set up a National Family Protection Committee, but that fell through. When we told the Department of Women's Affairs that the provisions of the Act on the authorised persons were specifically included for implementation in the rural areas, they didn't listen, and appointed

authorised persons in the urban areas. There seemed an unwillingness to fully implement the contents and provisions of the Family Protection Act. They didn't understand the Act properly. They don't know the ins and outs of it. I trained people on the Family Protection Act, and VWC translated the Act into Bislama, because I wanted people to know and understand the meaning of the law. Not many Government people really know what the Family Protection Act is, up until today. That was how we felt, it was a hard challenge. The legislation was really needed by women, but they didn't take it on board, and women are still dying, and they don't seem to care.

"I trained people on the Family Protection Act, and VWC translated the Act into Bislama, because I wanted people to know and understand the meaning of the law."

Is there any support that you want to mention for this period, or is it much the same as you said before? Was there anything new in terms of local, regional, or international support?

The partnerships now are at different levels, like the World Bank recognising and trusting us to provide training to the China Civil Engineering and Construction Company (CCECC). We trained both Chinese and ni-Vanuatu in Port Vila and Santo, working on airports upgrading, funded by the World Bank. I think because of the recognition and the work that we did with the World Bank, they are now putting together a regional program also like that, to do the same thing with any other future regional infrastructure work. And that was because we were the only ones doing that work with the World Bank and the Airports Authority here in Vanuatu.

UN Women trusted us to do their survey of market women. They recognised our expertise and experience in the elimination of violence against women and children (EVAWC). They funded the Penama branch when it was established in 2016 and no other funding was available, and then in 2020 they supported us through the Pacific Partnership Program. They keep on asking us to do work for them, like training women with the Markets for Change program. Oxfam also stepped in to provide funds for MCC in 2020 when we were struggling to find funds to cover all the branches. At that level, our support has grown.



5-day workshop with women from the Neil Thomas Ministry, 2014

Locally and nationally, we did a lot of things during this time. We did a lot of training for church groups, both men and women, and youth. I suppose the fact is that, all through these years, our focus was on training and community awareness raising around the country, and especially to women. We were also working with and doing training with the Vanuatu Police Force, the Courts,

Prosecutions, the Ministry of Justice and Community Services, Corrections, the Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF), and with the health and education sectors.



5-day workshop with the Port Vila Anglican Mother's Union, 2014

We have had more local and national support over this last ten years, with the Chiefs, and other leaders. The Branches have had support from the leaders on the ground in the provinces – the Provincial Government and provincial leaders there are supporting them, but also the local Chiefs, the Council of Chiefs, church leaders and those kinds of things. At the national level, I think we have that support also from the Government. So I think we are enjoying a lot more respect and recognition of the work we are doing, and recognition of our expertise. On National Women's Day in 2020, the Australian High Commission awarded the International Women's Day 40th Anniversary Gender Equality Advocate Award to VWC.^{xxiv}

At the regional level, we also have that recognition. FWCC, under the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women (PWNAAVW), agreed for VWC to do training for the Family Support Centre in the Solomon Islands on counselling and male advocacy. FWCC recognised us, and invited me and us to attend and assist with these types of trainings and other things. I was always invited to attend workshops with Shamima Ali and other FWCC staff to support the facilitation, in male advocacy in different countries, and for counselling skills training, such as in Tuvalu. So this was a recognition of our expertise and experience and was done on behalf of the Regional Network.



FWCC and the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women were a constant source of support for VWC – from left: Edwina Kotoisuva (FWCC), 'Ofa Guttenbeil-Likiliki (Women and Children Crisis Centre, Tonga), Shamima Ali (FWCC), Penny Williams (Australian Global Ambassador for Women and Girls), Marilyn, and Helen Hakena (Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency, Bougainville, PNG), 2012

Recently, we had the Coordinator and a Counsellor from the Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre (KWCS) coming over to see how we do things. We had the Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) wanting to come last year with a delegation, and the Family and Sexual Violence Action Committee (FSVAC) in PNG also wanted a group from the mine to see how we do our work, especially with the CAVAWs, although as it turned out they weren't able to come to Vanuatu. So I suppose there is a little bit of regional recognition and acceptance that we do have something that they can learn from. I suppose that FWCC is always talking about our work with other people, but these are people who want to come and see exactly what we do.

Do you think there were any changes in VWC's values or strategies in the last ten years, or any changes in direction?

No – it was building on the strategies from earlier. But is it worth mentioning the client support fund? The amount of that fund grew a lot in the last phase (from 2013) including for the safehouse. That links to our implementation of the Family Protection Act and our work with police, which stepped up at the same time. And that has a big impact for women. The dissemination of the prevalence survey findings also contributed to this, because that resulted in more and more women coming forward to seek this kind of help.

We improved on how we collected our data by recruiting a Research Officer (although that happened in 2007). We didn't really change strategy with counselling, but we did bring in several new things to consolidate our counselling so that we could provide better services to women. We strengthened our counselling services by appointing a Counselling Supervisor in 2013. We also had to increase the number of counsellors. We have seven counsellors now in Port Vila, compared to four in 2010. And that was because of the increase in clients seeking help during this whole period. We needed to add a second Legal Officer to our team in 2015, and later we added further to our legal capacity by recruiting a Police Liaison Officer in 2018.



Over the decades, most VWC staff and many CAVAWs and male advocates received 4-weeks training at FWCC's Regional Training Program, which provided core knowledge and skills for responding to and preventing violence against women: VWC's Police Liaison Officer Maryline George graduates from the Regional Training Program, shown with Elizabeth (Sabet) Cox

Appointing a Police Liaison Officer is a good example of the creative approach you have, because you did this to try and solve the problems and blocks in women's cases in the justice system.

It has to be said that working with the police was not always smooth. We provided training to the Police Executive in early 2019. That is a milestone in our work with the police, and shows the strengthening of the partnership. Taking the opportunity of having a Police Liaison Officer, Maryline George, was an effective modification. She helps a lot in negotiating and talking in their language and pushing. She has contributed a lot to the work of VWC and the Vanuatu Police Force (VPF), by following up on clients' cases that the police haven't dealt with. This has ensured that women and children get some justice, and that the police and prosecutions are accountable.

After TC Pam, we saw the need for a Humanitarian Officer, and recruited her in 2019, and then in 2020/2021 we recruited a Communications Officer. In the community education and awareness-raising, we were always trying to use the findings from the research when we talked to people.

We needed to increase staff at some branches, such as SCC, MCC and PECC. Some strategies were modified when the research report came out – that is why we established PECC earlier than what we had originally planned. With MCC, we needed to increase their staff, because the number of clients was very high from the beginning. We had to support PECC through the Ambae volcano eruptions in 2016 and 2017. We had to change our approach, and consider how we could accommodate PECC when they had to move from Ambae to Pentecost. We had to look at their welfare, and consider that we had to build their toilet and bathroom and solar system to provide light and electricity for computers. These things are important to mention because people may think that it is easy to go into the islands, but where there are no resources like this at all, it is difficult. At the beginning, we talked about how we had to help the women in the rural areas – all these changes in approach were necessary to fulfil that vision.



During the volcano eruptions on Ambae in 2016 and 2017, and the subsequent evacuations and re-locations, VWC supported staff from the Penama Counselling Centre, originally located at the provincial centre on Ambae, and the Ambae CAVAWs, pictured above at a workshop in Luganville in November 2017

And with all these increases that I have mentioned, we also had to increase the number of finance staff in the office, because we needed to continue to be accountable with all this other growth in the program, with a lot more activities going on. But I should also mention that all this was a gradual growth. It wasn't that we wanted to increase the number of people in the office, just for the sake of it. We needed all these extra skills to manage the program, and we were doing it in response to a need from the clients and the community.

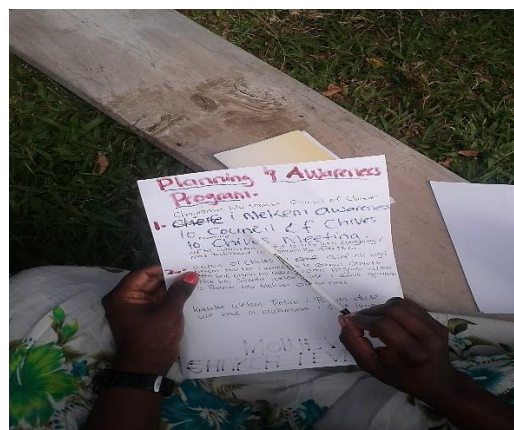
But the important thing in all this is that we never changed our values, principles or vision. We have always stayed focused on one program and one goal – to end violence against women and children. Another big thing is that, as a national organisation, we were able to purchase our own property, and got funding for that, after all those years of renting and advocating. But it took time to think about all

"At the beginning, we talked about how we had to help the women in the rural areas – all these changes in approach were necessary to fulfill that vision. ...

The important thing in all this is, we never changed our values, principles or vision. We have always stayed focused on one program and one goal – to end violence against women and children. ... Whenever we made any decisions to change or bring in something new, it came out from a need."

these things. We didn't just say, OK, we have to do it now, this one and that one. Whenever we made any decisions to change or bring in something new, it came out from a need. And we still kept on focusing on what is best for our clients, it was always going back to that point. For example, when we decided we needed a new building, it was because we were renting offices all over the place, and we missed some of our clients, they couldn't find us. So we needed to find a property so that we are there all the time for them, and the clients can find us. That is just one example.

Another example is that we increased our mobile counselling outreach, and again this was because it was the best way to get to the women. Since 1999, mobile counselling helped with the reach and raising of awareness. It is an effective strategy. We were doing up to twenty mobile counselling visits annually on Efate at one stage, to provide the opportunity to raise awareness so that women could get to know about our work, and to be there with them if they needed help. But then when DFAT did not increase our budget in line with the big growth of the program in 2016, we had to make hard choices and reduce the number of mobile counsellings to 6 per year, although we always tried to do more. And we couldn't recruit as much as we needed to, because we had a whole national program to provide across the country. We had to make some hard choices.



Above and below: 5-day community awareness workshop on Paama Island, 2016

Above: small group feedback, and the planning outcomes from one small group on the final day

Below: both women and men attended the workshop, and participated in separate small group sessions



So you then developed a new strategy of saving as much money everywhere you could, so that you could do some of those very important things that were no longer fully funded.

Yes, we have to say that. We couldn't afford to budget for the annual counsellor training after 2016, or to reprint some of our materials like posters and brochures, but we saved and saved to make some of that happen.

What about the fact that you have been doing your own male advocacy training – with Melkie Anton from PNG as the trainer – that is an achievement. Is it a modification to strategy?

Yes, it is an achievement, and another modification of strategy. And again we took a gradual approach. The first stage 3 training was in 2018. First we did stage 1, then we watched them closely, and then we took some of them to the CAVAW trainings or other trainings, and then we selected some for the stage 2 of the male advocacy training. We haven't done many second stage trainings, only two, and then gradually we began to look at stage 3 of the male advocacy curriculum.

When we began to work with men in this way, we were looking at how we can help our work in raising awareness. We started to think about how can the men help us, how can we work with the men in this area of violence against women and children. A lot of people want to do this male advocacy work now, and think it is an easy thing to do this work with men. But that is not the case. And I suppose the point here is that VWC is an agent of change, and doing work with men and on male advocacy is to change their attitudes, and to change the attitudes of all people in society about violence against women and children, and ending the discrimination that is committed on women and girls.

"It is important for other agencies trying to do this work now (male advocacy) to realise that it is not easy. ... it has to relate to the work that they are already doing. ... We listened to our clients and what they said about the attitudes of their men. ... You need to listen to women when working on this issue with men."

It is important for other agencies trying to do this work now to realise that it is not easy. They cannot just go and establish male advocacy, it has to relate to the work that they are already doing. We had to do it because it relates to the work that we are doing to end violence against women and children. We listened to our clients, and what they said about the attitudes of their men and what is happening to them. When you work on doing male advocacy, it has to relate, and it has to make sense to what you are doing, so that you can understand it fully. So training of men has to be a change effort, to change their attitudes and their thinking. It is not just bringing men together and blah blah to them, you have to all the time think about how to approach it, and what to put into it. So our training on male advocacy changes every time we go to the different men. If we are training Chiefs on Efate, the training has to be different than for another province. You have to know what you are going to say to those men. We want to change their attitudes, to change the society's thinking.

Melkie Anton, the trainer that we use now, is from PNG, another Melanesian country, and he understands ni-Vanuatu well, and works very well with them so far. And you need that – I cannot get an Australian to do my male advocacy here, for example. If anybody wants to do male advocacy here, they have to understand the society and the values here and the men here, and most importantly, you need to listen to women when working on this issue with men.

Melkie has undergone many sessions of training with FWCC, including the training of trainers (stage 4 of the male advocacy training program), and so we were happy with that, and FWCC

recommended him. But it is important to say that we work with him every time that he is in-country. We don't let him do the training by himself, we are there with him. And that is one principle that the Pacific Women's Network (PWNAAVW) has emphasised – if a man is doing that training, the women's movement has to be in that room also, as resource people. So Vola or I sit in that room with him to provide support and monitor the process.

With male advocacy, again we have to know how to work with men. I attended an FWCC male advocacy training in 2002, where Shamimi Ali trained us. This was the first training, and after that, I believed I could conduct stage 1 of the 4-stage male advocacy training program. So then we could begin stage 1 trainings in Vanuatu, which we now call male leaders workshops.

Lessons about strategy: male advocacy

- VWC's purpose in doing male advocacy work is to be an *"agent of change"* – to change the attitudes of all people in society about violence against women and children
- Male advocacy work needs to be informed by the experiences of women who are living with various forms of violence and discrimination
- VWC modifies male advocacy training to respond to different contexts, such as different provinces
- VWC's training in recent years has been undertaken by a PNG male advocate, trained in FWCC's male advocacy program – but there is always a VWC staff person in the room, to provide support and to monitor the process
- Ni-Vanuatu male advocates have had multiple opportunities to be trained, over several years, to consolidate their learning – not just in male advocacy training workshops, but also in VWC's other community awareness/ prevention activities
- Before progressing to stages 2, 3 and 4 of the male advocacy training program, a careful selection process takes place
- Male advocates must be held accountable for their behaviour – at home, in the community, and in their work as male advocates; if the wives and partners of male advocates come to VWC for help, the same assistance is given to these survivors as any other client

And from the participants in stage 1, you are careful to choose who should be selected to get more training through stages 2, 3 and 4, and often you train these men many times, in different workshops and trainings, to consolidate their learning. It is a long-term process.

I think I should say more about how our male advocates have worked with us.

You have quite a bit of evidence about that – it is important to say how complex it is, because it is needs to be recognised that they don't suddenly become perfect men overnight – as you said already, it is not easy.

One big achievement is how one male advocate, Iaken Ampen from the Vanuatu Police Force Academy is now including domestic violence training to all newly recruited police, when they undergo their training at the Police College. He also invites VWC to speak during their training. He is doing this as part of his official job. In addition to this, in his community work and his church he has assisted us. He assisted us to do training with the Neil Thomas Ministry. And here, we need a special mention about how the police officers who have been trained are taking up this job more seriously now. Not only Iaken, but male advocates on Tanna and other islands.

Some of the police trained as male advocates were promoted to take on work in Family Protection Units (FPUs), such as Davis Saravanu, who was the first person in charge of the FPU here in Vila, and is still very helpful and works very well with the centre – also the police on Malekula at the police station there. There are several who have been promoted, and we appreciate that, but that was after we had trained them through the male advocacy program. On Tanna, police and Chiefs who have been trained as male advocates are now working together with the Tanna branch of VWC, by reporting cases, referring them to the VWC, and supporting victims/survivors in many different ways.



Top: Sanma Correction Centre and Probation Officers: 5-day training conducted by VWC and the Police College, including officers from Torba and Malampa provinces

Middle: First 5-day training of the Vanuatu Police Force in Santo, organised with the Police College, who had earlier collaborated on a training of Vila Police officers

Bottom: 5-day training with members of the Vanuatu Mobile Force members in Vila.

All these trainings took place in 2014 and were made possible through the advocacy and other efforts of male advocate Chief Inspector Iaken Ampen (see Chapters 3 and 4 for his views on male advocacy work and violence against women and children).

Some of them continue to make mistakes in their personal lives, and VWC assists their wives if they come for help. You hold them accountable in both their private and personal lives.

Yes. Some have not fully practiced what they learned in their home lives – but they still help us in our work, and they help the women who come to them. Some are womanisers, we hear that, but they stay in their jobs.

After training police, we are finding that the police trained are much more effective now in terms of addressing violence against women and children, and most implement Family Protection Orders. Overall, that is evidence of the impact of our male advocacy work. Since we trained the Police Executive in 2019, last year (2020) and this year (2021), in all of their operations they are now taking domestic violence cases more seriously. They lock people up if they doing the wrong thing, such as during the special celebrations for Independence Day or at Christmas – and that is only because we have advocated for that over many years, and they understand now how dangerous it is for women, because they have gone through this training, and they know what domestic violence is. So they are changing their official behaviour. Whether they are changing personally, we don't know, but as an institution, they are making some changes.

“After training police, we are finding that the police trained are much more effective now in terms of addressing violence against women and children, and most implement Family Protection Orders. Overall, that is evidence of the impact of our male advocacy work.”

Another part of our work, in addition to the training of the police, is our lobbying about the police and how they respond to violence against women and children as an institution. For example, this comes up in our meetings with DFAT, they want to know about all the things that we think should happen. When police advisors come from Australia or New Zealand to work with the Vanuatu Police Force, those advisors do listen to us and try to implement some of our suggestions in their own work here. When DFAT has a meeting with us, and we raise issues with them, they take it on, and they pass this on to the advisors, and the advisors take these matters up in their own work. Lobbying for changes with Prosecutions is another example of this. So I want to recognise that this is also a success and outcome of our advocacy work.



Maewo Chiefs and other male leaders at a VWC male leaders workshop in 2019

Some Chiefs who have been trained as male advocates are now helping VWC to serve Family Protection Orders to people in their villages. Clients go to them for help in getting in touch with us, they refer clients to VWC and the branches, and they also raise awareness on domestic violence. I want to stress that we have done a lot of work with Chiefs, and some of that leads up to the work

that has come recently, where the Malvatumaui has asked us to do a workshop with them, and other Island Councils of Chiefs – it is because of all this advocacy and lobbying and training we have done with the Chiefs over the decades, and some of the Chiefs who have become our male advocates after training are now members of Malvatumaui and Island Councils of Chiefs.

Sometimes people think that these outcomes are short-term, but in fact they are the result of decades of work, building and building and building.

Yes, that is very true. INGOs and other donors need to know that they cannot change things quickly. You call it something about waves, what is that?

“Some Chiefs who have been trained as male advocates are now helping VWC to serve Family Protection Orders to people in their villages. Clients go to them for help in getting in touch with us, they refer clients to VWC and the Branches, and they also raise awareness on domestic violence. ...

INGOs and other donors need to know that they cannot change things quickly.”

Sometimes there are waves you can ride in to the shore – these are like taking opportunities to take change further. But it is important that new actors realise that they are riding in on the waves that you have created, built up over many years, by creating an enabling environment for change over the decades. These really big outcomes that you see now, like having Councils of Chiefs and the Police Executive request training, are not possible because of what has happened in the last one year or even five years, but because of all that VWC had done since 1992, slowly building up and building up over the years.

Extending the octopus, and building the octopus up, by building an enabling environment.^{xxv} That is important for people doing this work now to recognise.



Police in Port Vila prepare a banner for the 16 Days of Activism Campaign in November-December 2015

Thinking back now to the very beginning – to the early vision that you had, and the seed that was planted back then – have you achieved what you thought you would?

Yes, for counselling services we have achieved. We have achieved a place where women can come and talk about their issues. Yes, we have got somewhere where we are known as counselling services, we have made women aware and they want to come to us, all over the country, and people are making referrals. So yes, for counselling services, when the seed was planted to offer a place where women can come and talk about their problems, yes. We know we haven't got to everybody, but we have built that up to where people are saying: go to Vanuatu Women's Centre. And other people are also doing that announcement to people, for example Wan Smol Bag in their plays, and police and leaders are also saying this.

As for eliminating the issue of violence against women and children, we are still very far from that goal, but we have got somewhere. And maybe some of our survivors will say that they are happy now that they have been to us. But as a blanket, we cannot say that about the issues, and it may never go away. But we are making progress, with things like legal protection, the Family Protection Act, amendments to the Penal Code, and things like more protection for children under thirteen years who are victims of sexual assault, with changes to the Penal Code on sentencing for perpetrators of these crimes.

"As for eliminating the issue of violence against women and children, we are still very far from that goal, but we have got somewhere."



VWC training with Seventh Day Adventist church leaders on Tanna, 2018

So we have made some headway, but we understand we cannot end VAWC, because it is do with attitudes and behaviours. But we have created an environment where people are aware of the criminal aspects of these matters.

I think from the beginning, in our 30 or so years, there have been a lot of strands or strategies that have contributed to some positive changes in communities and in personal behaviours, and brought happiness to some women and children. Very soon after we set up, we were learning from our counselling and we went into community education, and then learning from community education, we went into the need for changes in law and our awareness on the Family Protection Act. And since 2009 we have been talking about the Family Protection Act in all our community awareness, including workshops and trainings – we haven't stopped, we have kept it alive.

Has the organisation gone as far as you thought it would?

The organisation has gone beyond what we thought. At the beginning, we didn't know that we were going to have branches all over the provinces. But now we have branches all over, and our reach is nation-wide, and we have built a network nation-wide with the CAVAWs. We have got some strong men to change their behaviour and come on board and help us. So, organisationally we have grown, and our strategies on EVAWC have evolved. And I think one consistent thing is that we haven't changed our program – we have got one program and that is EVAWC. We haven't gone to pick up other programs, because that would confuse people. We are an organisation and could have done many things, but we were consistent.

“We have built a network nation-wide with the CAVAWs. We have got some strong men to change their behaviour and come on board and help us>”



The national network of CAVAWs in 2016 at CAVAW trainings, from top left to bottom right: Tafea, Malampa, Penama, Torba, Sanma and Shefa, with VWC staff

So it has gone much further than you thought it would

Surprise, surprise, yes. Not in my wildest dreams, you know. And the number of survivors that we have helped – even in just this year, how many have we seen! Did we know from nine clients that we saw in the first months in 1992, to how many now? In the beginning we didn't know whether women would be allowed to come, but women are now coming on their own. They don't need people to refer them, they have information on self-respect and know their rights, so they are coming, and it seems that we cannot even close for one day, because women are coming.

We have been talking a lot about strategies. Are any other thoughts about why you have gone so much further than you thought you would? Is it just that building, building and building? If someone young or new was to come and say, I really want to know how it happened, what are the main lessons, what would you say?

That the women were coming, the women are coming. If the women didn't come, we would stop, and think why, are our strategies right or not? And the women are hearing about us from CAVAWs, Branches, male advocates and Chiefs, and they are asking for more. I think that is one reason. We were doing what the women need, really need. And that is what we wanted in the beginning, that the women would come and talk to us about it, and not live with violence, and they are coming. And also from our survey, we saw that a lot of women are suffering, almost two out of three.

“Women are coming ... If the women didn't come, we would stop, and think why, are our strategies right or not? The women are hearing about us from CAVAWs, Branches, male advocates and Chiefs, and they are asking for more.”



Participants at VWC Malampa Health Centre training, 2018

So is there a learning from all that?

So we knew that the women out there were suffering, and pushed down. We created the awareness, then people became aware, and the media has come on board also and supported us and started to give that information, the leaders are giving that information, so the women are coming out to talk to us and seeking help, and other people are supporting us like police. We wanted to see whether young women were also coming to seek help, so we did some research on that and found that they make up a big proportion of our clients.^{xxvi}

So I think the lesson for us is about having the services, providing good services, and being available all the time. About availability, I am thinking that if we don't have someone in a place, a woman will suffer there. What do you think about it?

I think if you were not providing a confidential service, they wouldn't come. If you were not treating them with respect, or listening to them, they wouldn't come.

It's the human rights approach. I think women are comfortable because they know already what the churches are going to say, what the Chiefs are going to say, what their families are going to say. When they come, and we believe in them, and we listen to them, I think that is important. And we get up and walk around with them, we support them. Whereas when they go to other places for help, they may be looked down upon or told off, or told to go back. But we listen to them, and we keep their confidentiality, and this allows them to talk. We listen to what they want. Sometimes we don't agree, but we believe that it is her choice, and we work with her for that choice.

"It's the human rights approach. I think women are comfortable (to come to VWC) ... because we believe in them, and we listen to them, ... and this allows them to talk. We listen to what they want ... and we work with her for that choice."



Very soon after Tropical Cyclone Harold hit Vanuatu in March 2020, mobile counselling and support teams with Counsellors from SCC, VWC and PECC were visiting affected communities to provide material and counselling assistance, despite their own homes and relatives being affected in some cases – left, the SCC team climbs a hill with materials up to a village; right, the VWC and PECC team visits a community on Pentecost

It is clear also when I listen to the counsellors that they really care about the clients. It is not just a job for money – there is dedication and commitment. Is that one of the lessons?

Yes. I think it is about the human rights principles, because we listen to them, whereas other people will not listen to that survivor. They may advise her or tell her she is silly. We listen and believe them.

Does it help that some counsellors may also be survivors?

Some are survivors, and they have counselling skills, and they all have courage to help women. And the attitude to the survivor is important, not to blame them. There may be a bond there.

Some staff in Port Vila have experienced VAW. If we understand the prevalence research, two out of every three women in Vanuatu have experienced violence from a partner or husband. That is like a mat that they sit on already, and they know some strands in that mat already, from the experiences they have gone through. They may have dealt with it, or they may learn new skills or ways to deal

with it. And over time, they are sitting on their chair counselling, and they build their knowledge over the years about how to deal with these cases. Sometimes it is similar cases, and sometimes it is new and they build on their skills.

Has the journey been what you thought it would be?

The journey was not what I thought, because I didn't know how this was going to go. But I have enjoyed the progress up until now, and learning along the way – learning along the way with donors and especially with the staff, and on top of that, learning along the way from the experience of survivors. All the steps along the way with VWC's work in this program has all been informed by our work with survivors. We are always analysing the cases and seeing how best we can help the client. It is that principle about the survivor being the centre of our work, and that is what has taken us to where we are. And if she is in Torress, we would like to get to her, if she is in Aneytium, we would like to get to her. We have learned from all of them who have come in.

"All the steps along the way have been informed by our work with survivors. ... If she is in Torress, we would like to get to her, if she is in Aneytium, we would like to get to her. We have learned from all of them ..."

So the strategies have been informed by the experience of the survivor. So if she went to the police, and the police are not helping her, we look at how we can help – what strategies we are going to put in place, what human beings we are going to put in place – so for example we got the Police Liaison Officer. If a survivor's case hasn't been dealt with, then how can we get justice for her? She has a right to access justice. And that is also why we had to find the appropriate tools, such as the FPA. Whatever is needed, we try to find the resources for her. Always, we are being informed by the experience and needs of the survivor, and that is the centre of our work. And that has informed all our strategies – the CAVAWs, the male advocacy, safehouse, getting the lawyer in the first place, all of it.



Meryl and her long-time supporter, Shamima Ali from FWCC

Vanuatu Women's Centre Milestones: achieving momentum, deepening changes, 2011 – 2020^{xxvii}

2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Torba Counselling Centre (TOCC) opens, VWC's third provincial branch, following agreement with the Torba Provincial Government in 2010 ▪ Prevalence study published: "Vanuatu National Survey on Women's Lives and Family Relationships" in October in Port Vila and November in Canberra ▪ First public recognition of VWC's work to address the problem of violence against women and children at ministerial level in Parliament in December
2012	<p>By the end of the 5-year funding phase in June 2012 VWC had seen an enormous increase in clients and requests for information about VAW, and breakthroughs with some key stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There was a huge increase in the number of women accessing justice with VWC assistance, from 79 requesting Domestic Violence Court Orders in 2007/2008 to 317 Family Protection Orders (FPOs) issued in 2011/2012 under the FPA ▪ VWC's outreach into rural areas was strengthened with 41 active CAVAWs raising awareness in remote communities ▪ FPU's were now established in Sanma, Tafea and Malampa provinces <p>VWC receives Australian Aid funding for a 4-year phase through to June 2016, although New Zealand ceases support for SCC and safehouse facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Working collaboratively in partnership with key national sectors and organisations is identified as a key strategy to accelerate change in attitudes, behaviours and access to justice, including law and justice, health, provincial government, chiefs, faith-based organisations, education, and key civil society organisations ▪ Ongoing dissemination of the findings of the prevalence study on VAW in each province, through VWC and Branch community education and training activities – a practice that continues to the present day
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VWC receives Australian Aid support to purchase and renovate its own building in Port Vila ▪ Breakthrough in reaching out to key male leaders in Tafea Province, with the Nikoletan Council of Chiefs participating in a 5-day workshop facilitated by VWC ▪ VWC's Coordinator and FWCC's Coordinator co-facilitate a male advocacy training with senior civil servants and Magistrates in PNG in August ▪ VWC launches advertisements on Television Blong Vanuatu (TBV) where key male leaders including chiefs describe the protections available through FPOs – these advertisements are replayed at no cost by TBV from time to time through to April 2015 ▪ A room is set up in the outpatients' department at Vila Central hospital, staffed by a nurse trained in counselling by VWC, to ensure priority is given to survivors of VAWC referred by VWC or the police ▪ Recognition of temporary special measures for municipal government, which VWC lobbied for with others, including by presenting a petition to the Council of Ministers meeting held in Sola in May 2013
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Justice and Community Services Sector (JCSS) Strategy recognises the key issue of VAW and VWC's key role in prevention and response^{xxviii} ▪ Establishment of a Human Rights Committee in Vanuatu, which VWC lobbied for over several years ▪ Breakthroughs with VWC providing training in collaboration with the Police College to: Correctional and Probation officers in Santo, including officers from Torba and Malampa, done in collaboration with the Police College; the Vanuatu Police Force (VPF) in Santo; and the Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF) ▪ Two breakthroughs with church agencies included training women from the Neil Thomas Ministry and the Anglican Mother's Union ▪ A training with the Penama Council of Women in April on Ambae and the sharing of the VWC research findings with Penama local authorities in early May built on earlier good relations established with the Penama Police Patrol, and led to several community-based workshops (in 2014 and 2015) and a 5-day training with the Pentecost Council of Chiefs
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Malampa Counselling Centre (MCC) opens, VWC's fourth provincial branch

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prevention work in Penama province in 2014 was followed up with 2 workshops in Loltong in November 2015, one with women conducted by SCC, and another with Loltong Chiefs in Northeast Pentecost conducted by VWC; this is just one example of many areas that had previously refused to accept VWC workshops and training in Penama, Malampa and Tafea provinces ▪ 5-day trainings of male leaders from: the Southern Island Presbytery on Tanna; Tafea Provincial Government Councillors; the Tafea Provincial Council of Churches; and the Tafea Police Patrol ▪ A VWC-trained Police male advocate from the Tafea Family Protection Unit began regular weekly visits to TCC to provide assistance and follow-up, and this close collaboration continues to the present day ▪ VWC trials the strategy of having trained male advocates accompany VWC staff and police on community awareness and mobile counselling visits, and this effective practice continues to the present day ▪ VAW more frequently recognised as a national issue with several new policies released: Vanuatu Police Force (VPF) “Standard Operating Procedures”, VPF “Family Violence Policy”, Department of Women’s Affairs “National Gender Equality Policy, 2015-2019” ▪ VWC invited for the first time to provide short training sessions to the judiciary
2016	<p>By the end of the 4-year funding phase in June 2016, VWC had again exceeded most of its targets, consolidated its partnerships and extended its training reach far more than expected, in its efforts to embed change in attitudes and practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VWC facilitated 21 trainings with other agencies in Vanuatu in 4 years including 11 with VPF and VMF, 2 with the Department of Corrections, 1 with a Provincial Council of Women, 1 with youth leaders and other sectors ▪ VWC facilitated 12 week-long male leaders’ workshops and 2 follow-up male advocacy trainings, with more than 360 men trained (one-third were Chiefs), and some attending more than one training ▪ A UN Women review of VAW found that VWC played a critically important role in ensuring that women throughout Vanuatu can access justice^{xxix} ▪ Several faith-based organisations and church leaders took steps to respond appropriately to VAWC ▪ Penama Provincial Government requested VWC to establish a branch in the province ▪ Increased referrals of women to VWC, Branches and CAVAWs, from Church leaders, women’s leaders, the family and friends of clients, clients who have managed to bring about a change in their lives, Chiefs, and male advocates ▪ Some Provincial and Area Councillors begin to make referrals to VWC and the branches, and some Area Councils begin to request VWC workshops on VAWC ▪ Provincial Education Offices in Sanma and Torba facilitated Branch involvement in awareness-raising on VAWC in schools ▪ VWC ran workshops with International NGOs for the first time, including World Vision and Oxfam staff ▪ Amendments made to the Penal Code to increase sentences for sexual assault and incest <p>VWC began a new 5-year funding phase with support from Australian Aid, although the national program is no longer fully funded, and VWC needs to source funds from other donors for key activities</p>



Her Excellency Jenny Da Rin, Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu, shares a moment with VWC and DFAT staff, November 2017

2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Penama Counselling Centre (PECC) opens, with funding provided by UN Women (UNW) – VWC now has a branch in each province ▪ VWC consolidates partnership with the health sector, with 3 trainings provided by VWC to staff from Port Vila Hospital and Vanuatu College of Nursing Education, including one counselling skills training to midwives and 3rd year nurses, and made inputs into VWC inputted into the Department of Health manual on VAW and referral protocol. ▪ First training on VAW provided to CARE staff in Vanuatu ▪ Partnership with UNW to assist them with a survey of market women ▪ Two VWC male advocates and CAVAW members appointed as authorised persons and registered counsellors for the Ministry of Justice and Community Services' trial implementation of the FPA ▪ VWC establishes its own provincial EVAW Task Forces to problem-solve FPA implementation and collaborate on effective response and prevention efforts, including with Provincial Government authorities ▪ The Vaturisu Council of Chiefs held its first meeting dedicated to VAWC at the end of a training workshop provided by VWC ▪ Four trainings were delivered to Pacific agencies including 3 to the Solomon Islands Family Support Centre and 1 on counselling skills in East New Britain province of PNG
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VWC provides male advocacy training in the Solomon Islands, in collaboration with the Family Support Centre

2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Marilyn Tahi receives the “Commonwealth Point of Light” award from the UK Government^{xxx} ▪ VWC supports Penama branch and CAVAWs on Ambae through the Lobenben volcano eruptions, evacuations and relocations, and provides community awareness on VAWC during disaster response and rehabilitation to evacuated communities, through the many months of the disaster until their eventual resettlement and repatriation ▪ Prevention workshops were held with the China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC staff) and urban communities close to the Port Vila airport construction, in a new partnership with the World Bank ▪ VWC appoints its first Police Liaison Officer in August, initially as a volunteer, and later as a full-time and permanent position ▪ On VWC’s recommendation, Magistrates begin holding court reviews of Family Protection Orders (FPOs) prior to their expiry to extend FPOs if required ▪ The first ever custodial sentence for an FPO breach was given in Tafea Province ▪ Steps taken in some villages of Tafea Province to reform village bylaws to protect women’s rights, prompted by TCC prevention activities and previous training of Chiefs by VWC ▪ Evidence of increased referrals from and collaboration with Public Prosecutors as a result of VWC’s ongoing advocacy
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VWC’s conducts one week training for the first time with 18 senior police officers in charge of different units in the Port Vila station and Shefa Police Posts (Epi, Tongoa and North Efate), followed up later in the year with training of senior police officers in the Northern and Southern commands ▪ This breakthrough was largely due to the work of the VWC Police Liaison Officer, who was also effective in progressing cases where no police action had been taken for months or years ▪ VWC’s appoints a Humanitarian Response Officer, to assist with emergency preparation, response and advocacy on VAW in disasters and emergencies ▪ Several workshops conducted with young people through the Vanuatu National Youth Council, Stretem Rod Blong Jastis youth group, and CARE International young women leaders ▪ Strengthened partnership with UN Women Markets for Change program, with VWC conducting a series of community awareness activities with market women ▪ Co-facilitation of a training with health workers in North Efate, using the Health GBV manual co-developed with the VWC, followed up by 4 Provincial health training programs conducted to strengthen referral links and survivor-centred health services ▪ VWC trains all Authorised Persons and Registered Counsellors appointed under the Family Protection Act (FPA), followed up by a stage 2 male advocacy training including all Authorised Persons ▪ Magistrates Court introduces a Domestic Violence Action Plan and improvements to FPO procedures

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VWC trains Councils of Chiefs in North Tanna and Maewo, and Ministry of Education staff
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Marilyn Tahī receives the Australian High Commission 2020 International Women's Day 40th Anniversary Gender Equality Advocate Award^{xxxī} ▪ New funding agreements with UNW to support Penama Branch, male advocacy and research activities, and with Oxfam to support Malampa Branch ▪ 100 community awareness/prevention sessions were held with 4,740 people in VWC's emergency response to remote island communities following Tropical Cyclone Harold and the Tanna ashfall by VWC and Branch staff in Penama, Sanma, Malampa and Tafea provinces ▪ VWC publishes its research report on violence against young women and girls^{xxxīī} ▪ New VWC toll-free hotline set up ▪ Vanuatu's Council of Ministers directed that government and justice agencies prioritise family violence in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in new interactions with government departments such as Forestry and Fisheries, and government representatives from across all sectors taking VWC materials on community outreach visits and publicising the toll-free number ▪ Follow up training in the education sector including with 17 school Principals
2021	<p>By the end of the 5-year funding phase in June 2021, VWC had deepened its partnerships with a range of national and provincial agencies and many communities, many of whom are now working actively to prevent and respond to VAWC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The VWC Network provided more than 34,500 counselling sessions throughout Vanuatu in 5 years, including over 10,000 new clients who had never asked for help from VWC, a branch or CAVAW before; 69% of these were seeking help to deal with domestic violence ▪ More than 7,700 clients were assisted to seek help with domestic violence or sexual assault from the police ▪ More than 4,600 clients were assisted to apply for Family Protection Orders; this accounts for the great majority of FPOs issued by the Courts over the previous 5 years ▪ More than 230 community awareness prevention activities were done nationally, and 75% of these were reaching out to new groups who had never heard VWC's messages before ▪ More than 26,000 people across all provinces participated in these prevention activities: 38% were women, 24% were men, 20% were girls and 18% were boys <p>VWC began a new 5-year funding phase with support from Australian Aid through to June 2026, although the national program is not fully funded, and negotiations will be needed with to ensure that Penama and Malampa branches, male advocacy training, and research continue to be funded in the future</p>

Looking to the future: what is the vision, what lies ahead?

What future do you see for VWC, and for the VWC Network^{xxxiii} as a whole?

Strengthening the branches, and strengthening our work. OK, we have established ourselves, and now it's time to build the roof, the walls, the floor of the branch work – and also here, in all of our work. And we need to continue working closely with other partners, to see how can they help. For example, we have started with the health sector, and I am happy that last week, the person in charge of the Nursing School stopped me along the road and said, hey, I am emailing you to come back to talk at the Nursing School. Things like that. So we want to strengthen those partnerships, and maybe go into new areas, to see how can we work with more with the doctors, and how can we work more with the Ministry of Education in the next phase.



VWC honours Marilyn on National Women's Day, May 2021 by celebrating her role and work at the centre with food, a gift, drama and songs

Organisationally, we need to continue to strengthen VWC, and we need to get our own office space in the provinces. That is one thing maybe that we will be looking at, for them to have a home. And then for PECC, it is the humanitarian situation – how long can we move them and move them again. We heard on the news that all the volcanoes are getting active – Ambae, Sola, Ambrym, Tanna, Lopevi close to Epi, and Gaua, and there is also climate change. The humanitarian work is growing now, and in the future, maybe it will be bigger with the volcanoes and climate change.



SCC staff ready to load another truck with water for distribution on Malo Island following Tropical Cyclone Harold, 2020

"The humanitarian work is growing now, and in the future, maybe it will be bigger with the volcanoes and climate change."

What are the main challenges that you think may lie ahead? Are you still worrying about where the next funding is coming from, as you mentioned earlier?

Well, I don't know. DFAT are giving money to many organisations now who claim to be working on violence against women. But the fact is that, these are mainly INGOs, but is there any alliance with national or local organisations? I don't know. But I know that there is no local organisation doing this work on violence against women and children besides us. Who else do we have? VNCW doesn't have anything on domestic violence. I believe that Australian Aid will always support VWC, but I don't know if UN Women and Oxfam will continue to support us.

I think at the end of every funding phase it is a challenge and a worry until you get that commitment. But the difference now is that there are others seeking funding too, who claim to be experts. Is that what concerns you?

Yes, I think that is where I am. Yes, and they are not national organisations. They can "climb the mountain", but they are not going to climb on our backs. So this is one challenge for us.

It is an outcome of your success that all these other organisations are taking up the issue of VAWC.

Yes, yes, yes. But do we not have the capacity to do all these other things that Australian Aid is funding them to do, or do we not have the capacity to do these other things that they are doing? For me, it is a time of reflection now at the top of the mountain, and see what else we can do, and where we can do this work. So now we have branches with our reach in each province, so now it is time to strengthen that reach of the branches, and give them more responsibility to do their work well. So it's like, building up their capacity and finding the right people.

Is that also one of the recurring challenges, to build the capacity of staff, to understand the issue in that really deep way?

Yes, and retaining them. Some of our staff have left to go to the INGOs, because their salaries are good, and they get authority and power in these organisations.

That is a testament to you. VWC has trained women for the benefit of the whole country. But even if everyone in the organisation was a survivor, does that mean they understand the issue, in terms of the gender power relations?

No, that's right. For example, a staff member might have a lot of skills and status, but may not know anything about domestic violence. Staff need to look into themselves, and that is part of my job – there has to be a willingness to self-reflect and accept that domestic violence does happen, and the best way to address it, and not blame women.

For the challenge for the provinces, for the reach, you know, we should have our own buildings in order to keep us going. It is going to cost a lot of money, but this is what we need.

Possible future challenges

- Competition for funds
- Other (external) actors claiming results that are partly or mainly due to the groundwork done by VWC over 3 decades of work
- Retaining staff after investing for many years in building their capacity
- Sustaining the work of the branches in the provinces
- Retaining the respect and recognition of VWC's work by the Vanuatu Government
- Having a permanent facility to provide safe accommodation for women and children who need urgent protection from violence
- Making a smooth transition to a new Coordinator and the ongoing management of a large national program

Is that about sustainability, showing that VWC is going to be there for the women for the long-term?

Yes, sustainability. And let's face it, I am not going to be here all the time.

Another challenge for us is that the Government will keep trusting us and be happy to keep working with us. For now, we have a former staff in the Department of Women's Affairs, but that doesn't mean they will always accept and support us. I think the Government is going to continue to recognise and respect us, but that requires a lot of patience and work. You have to work at it.

Are there any other challenges on your mind for the future?

Keeping everything going, managing it all, and pulling it together. For me, I want to phase myself out – and have someone else in this chair. I have been watching all the staff all these years, and trying to build people up, and I hope some are not building themselves to leave. I need to think quickly about how to build the skills of staff and capable people. I have already started, and I see improvements. Some are stepping up, and it has been successful to get the Port Vila staff to step up to do training and workshops. One strategy I have used is to have a management team.

"For me, I want to phase myself out, and have someone else in this chair."

I am trying to find new approaches to training for the Branch Project Officers. For example, Project Officers are already doing community awareness, but they need to be able to do 5-day workshops so we can consolidate our work and the changes in the islands. They need to be able also to do counselling training for their staff. CAVAWs need to be managed well by VWC, and community awareness and education needs to be of high quality, so that people understand the messages well. And I hope that the male advocacy training continues in the right direction and ways.

Counselling has to be strengthened and managed well at all levels – because that is where our work begins, and it has to be done well. And when we do our community awareness, it has to be high quality.

So what I am saying is that whenever we go out into communities, we have to do it well, because we have to change attitudes and the mentality of discrimination. So these things are ongoing challenges, whoever is in the job. I hope that my comments here are not seen as though I don't trust anyone else. I am not saying that. I am saying that these are always challenges, to keep the quality of all the services very high.



VWC counsellor training, 2020, where one of VWC's newest counsellors (Alice Leimara Kalorib) presents the outcomes from small group work on the impacts of domestic violence on children, drawing on the findings of the national prevalence study published in 2011

Any other challenges?

I hope that providing safe accommodation for women is done effectively. I am worried that we really should have a safehouse here. We need to look into how we can manage a safehouse for Vanuatu, and how we institutionalise it – but so far there has never been enough ongoing funds to do that.



VWC staff in 2020 with a banner celebrating the 40th anniversary of Vanuatu's independence

What about the changes in the context that you were talking about before? Can the injection of funds into INGOs help to build on the work you have done? You said that listening to the survivors was the core of your work and effectiveness, and I agree. Are you concerned about who defines the agenda for change in future – an outside expert, or you from this culture and place?

Up until now, donors have listened to us. We know our place here and our culture and we know what will work here. It can be a threat in that INGOs also have nationals working with them, and they can listen to them. So that can be a risk – we say we know the issues, but they may say they know it also. But we will always be informed by what is best for our clients, by the needs of our clients, and we will know what to have in place. It is a challenge that we can meet. If I am not here, can a new person who replaces me manage it? Personality issues also come into play on how you work with INGOs. New people also come in with new ideas of how to do things. We need to be strong on these issues, and it's how you strategize to be heard and have your view taken seriously.

As we are talking now, one thing that I want to say is that I am a rural woman. I understand how I grew up, I value my roots and I value where I came from. My parents were not very rich, they were from church backgrounds, and I knew how to work in that setting, so to say. Even though I am a modern woman now, I still have that in my skin, and I am very conscious of that. When you are strategizing and building partnerships, you value yourself, and you value the organisation for tomorrow – these things also come into play. I wanted to work with the churches and the Chiefs. That background has given me that knowledge. But in the future, the situation and the strategies needed may be

"I want to say that I am a rural woman. ... I value my roots and where I came from. ... I wanted to work with the churches and the Chiefs. That background has given me that knowledge. But in the future, the situation and the strategies may be different, and the influx of clients may also be different."

different, and the influx of clients may also be different. For example, at the very beginning we had all those very local women who wanted to go through custom courts, and that has changed along the way.

Is there anything else that is important to document about the vision, achievements, and what may lie ahead?

I don't want to forget you, and Sabet (Elizabeth Cox) and Sue Finucane and those kinds of people who were not here all the time. You were coming and going, but others were in the background. To me, for the leadership and information guidance, things like that were so important also. To cry upon, Shamima Ali from FWCC was there, but there were other people also. We should not forget that, and I don't know how many others have that? People you can ask silly questions to, for example. Feminists, because you understand, believe in our work also, and believe in our cause.

We are not rural women like you.

But you understood this community work, and you were committed to help other people like us. You were ready to listen, rather than pushing your words to us at all levels, and you didn't impose. And you were always talking transparently – I never felt suspicious of you or Sabet or Sue. And I feel that if I had those moments, I would have gone to the phone and said that.

That is a very nice thing for you to say. But I think it is true that we weren't in for ourselves or our reputations.

You were in it for us. And also I understood your roles, and I respected that, and I held you accountable to that too. It was clear roles, and it was enjoyable. Rather than if I felt somebody was saying things, and doing something that wasn't right, and sometimes I could say, and sometimes I couldn't say, like that. I never felt like that. But it is worth mentioning the many people like yourselves, who had that kind of understanding, and who were working with us.

You said you also wanted to mention something more about the training that FWCC provided to VWC staff?



FWCC has trained most of our staff at the Regional Training Program^{xxxiv}, from the very early days right up until now. This training assisted our staff to be empowered and build their skills and capacity. Vanuatu had no such training. Through FWCC, we also had the opportunity to attend regular meetings of the Pacific Regional Network Against Violence Against Women, which was a huge support and solidarity for us, from the early days right up to now.

FWCC Coordinator Shamima Ali facilitating a session at FWCC's Regional Training Program in Suva

Early life, values and experiences of Marilyn Rose Tahigogona

Do you want to discuss some more personal questions?

Let's try.

I know you want to be modest, but not everyone can do what you have done and achieved. Not everyone can build an organisation from scratch, not everyone has that staying power.

And I don't want to claim it, but I think I was pushy a little bit, and I think I pushed my understanding, my information, my ideas. Also, when we came back from Fiji, Janet Saksak Boedovo went back to the police, and we were left, me and Elizabeth Mermer. I felt that I had more power and more information, because I had twenty years past experience, in the Government and VNCW and things like that. So I think I knew a little bit more. But I always wanted a Collective and wanted to be inclusive with all my staff up until now – I don't want to claim me alone. And at the same time I understood that me alone, I couldn't do it all. There are all these people who are contributing to the effectiveness of VWC as an organisation, and the effectiveness of our work.



Marilyn (back row, second from the left) next to brother Albert, at their village school in 1958 on Ambae

So you recognised that it needs to be a joint effort. You said earlier that you were always interested in women's issues, and women's work and women's rights. But where did that come from? Was it family, church, your own experiences, or role models?

Can I peel over? I was in Girl Guides in my secondary school, and I and several of my friends were in the first class ever in Vanuatu to earn a first class badge in Girl Guides. So I was starting to take leadership, and I think I learned a lot about myself, and I valued that experience, because I think I learned a lot about how to relate to others in Girl Guides. And then in school we did the Duke of Edinburgh award – that is about learning how to serve community. And I was a sports person and I was involved in a lot of women's sports, like netball and athletics. I attended national and regional sporting competitions, including the Pacific Games in Port Moresby in 1969.

But if I go back to my birth parents and my early days, I think I got it from them. They were very rural. My father was one of two first ever ni-Vanuatu men who went to medical school in Fiji. He married my mother in 1946. He was selected from a very rural school in the middle of Pentecost. He was chosen by the church to go to a senior school, and then later on went to high school, and then later on came out to be a leader on his own to build that hospital on Ambae, the Gordon Memorial Hospital at Lolowai, and stayed there until he died in 1967. I followed my father all the time. I listened to both my father and my mother.

My mother's father was a priest, and they went to the Solomon Islands during World War II and were caught up there, and then they came back when she was a young woman. She didn't finish school, and got married to my father. I had a Christian missionary upbringing – Sunday school, church every day, morning and evening, and then going to church schools. And then I went to senior school, it was a church school before I went to the British Secondary School (now called Malapoa

College). I think all that taught me that you are a special girl. But I learnt it the hard way, the school back home was very local but you fight your way through those schools.

It sounds as though you got two things from that: values about community and service, and also you observed that enormously big thing that your father achieved. You observed that you can do things, and make things better. What do you think?

Yes, and the church values were strong, and it was about service to others also. I think it was the church that we went to every day until I came over here to go to the British Secondary School (Malapoa College in Port Vila) when I was sixteen. Duke of Edinburgh was also about service, and I got my silver award in that. And I was leading in Girl Guides. And in the sport, it teaches you how to respect yourself and your team. I was team captain. And at Malapoa College, from 1966 to 1970, I was house captain, and I was the female student leader.

So you had a lot of experience of leadership as a young person.

And you had to learn to be considerate of others. I had always felt proud of myself at my secondary school, and shared leadership and cooperation with other girls. If you are a team captain in a sports team, you have to pull them together. We won all the time and our medals are still up there at Malapoa College.

What about female role models?

When I got into the political Independence struggles, then I was more close to Hilda Lini. I am happy that she still supports me to today. She was one of them, and one of the outstanding ones with the party that I was supporting – the Vanua’aku Pati. And my husband was in that too, and then I went into the women’s wing as one of the supporting leaders. So there was that consciousness of building the nation.

For my parents, I have to follow the church values.

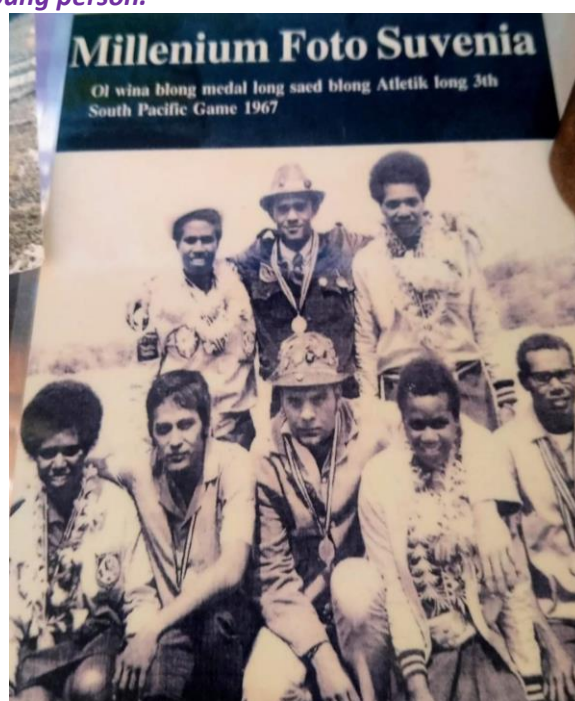
I was sixteen years old in 1966 when I was selected to attend the British Secondary School.

My future husband had already “blocked” me with my parents (meaning that he claimed me as his future wife). My future husband was here in Port Vila, and he went to tell my principal, she is mine, and she can only visit me, etc. etc.

My father had very strong leadership skills. He was the only one there, but the church listened to him. Not that they treated him nicely, but he was there and he worked with the Chiefs of Penama and Torba. So I think I learned about leadership right through, from family and from schooling.

When you were blocked by your husband, you weren’t happy then.

No, I didn’t like that at all, but I respected my parents, and they were poor, so who was going to reimburse all those mats? My father passed away in 1967 and I was married in 1971. So I had to follow this custom and respect my mother, because my mother was poor and couldn’t reimburse. It



Marilyn (back left) represented Vanuatu at the Pacific Games in Port Moresby in 1969, and was a medal winner in athletics and relay events

was a nuisance to me during schooling, because it prevented me from enjoying life at secondary school.

Blocking me like this shows the controlling behaviour by men over women that exists in traditional values, whether before or after formal marriage. But I didn't know this or see it this way until later on, when I did this work for VWC. This is the type of thing we see at the centre all the time – women being blocked by a mat, or a pig, or food or kava, and women believe that they are then owned by that man as his property – and that sometimes contributes to domestic violence, even though they are not legally married. I want other women to know that they don't have to accept this.

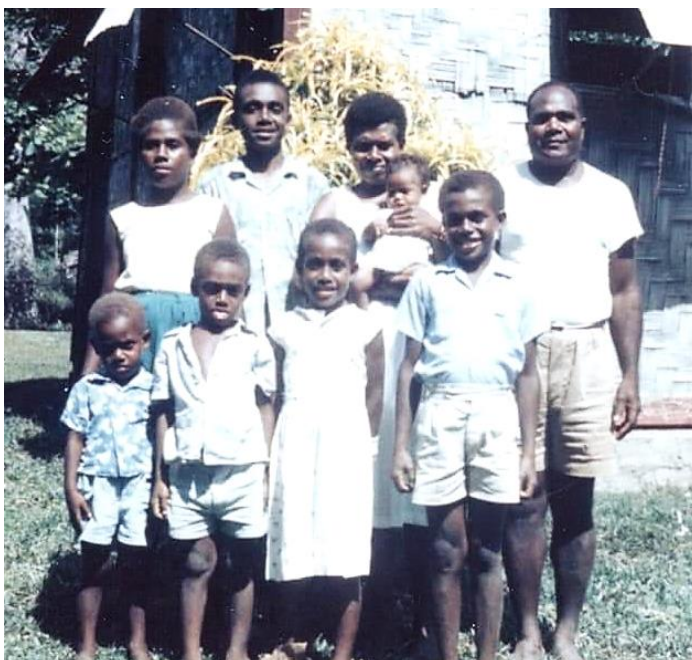
"This is the type of thing we see at the centre all the time – women being blocked by a mat, or a pig, or food or kava, and women believe that they are then owned by that man as his property. ... I want other women to know that they don't have to accept this."

You talked about being a survivor before, at the beginning of the interview, and you don't need to talk about it more. But the thing is, many women who live with violence suffer with their self-esteem, and they lose trust in themselves. How were you able to move through that?

I think it is because there was nobody else to run to for help. He was strong, and I just had to be suffering with it. I stayed with that for 26 years. But it didn't destroy me, and I think my work was my strength also. I had to go to work in order to forget, or to deal with it.

Do you think that the strong self-esteem and values you had from your family helped you?

Certainly, certainly, and I think that my family network was so important for me. Not that my brothers were helping me, but I knew that they were there, and I didn't want to damage relationships if I had to leave him. Even though he was womanising, doing whatever, I stayed put, but I wanted to go into work every day so I can hide that black eye, and hide that feeling – here I am at work, and I was happy to talk to other people. Even if I went home and cried or whatever, I think that my strength was all my friends at work and my work colleagues.



Merilyn (back left) with her family on Ambae

So it was your work with the Government that kept you going?

I had to work. It was difficult work. I was with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and I was in the protocol area so I had to go to the airport and things like that. But let's say, every day I put on my clothes, it was just like covering all that abuse up. And even when I was Director for the Vanuatu Centre for International Relations, it was like that also. I had people there, and I was happy to share with my female colleagues, and I think that helped also. If I had kept it in, then maybe I would have given up. And remember, he was a parliamentarian for 20 years. Nobody would believe me for one minute if I said that he abused me.

But what about those female colleagues? Did they believe you?

Those ones believed me, they know. But I didn't report it to the police, I didn't have any courage then and I didn't know about that. How I learnt that you can use the police – that happened because another woman took me to court to pay a fine for assaulting her, over him. And I said, that is the end of fighting over men, and I stopped forever. That is also when I realised that the bride price over me meant nothing, because they could take me to court. I paid a fine of vt3,000. At that time, I didn't know that I could do anything about adultery. So I learned my lesson very early, before I did this work. But then I never, never, never fought with another woman of his.

The bride price is culturally important, but men can use it to control women, and this is a mis-use of the meaning of bride price. Up until my husband died, he was still seeing other women. But in this job at VWC, I never felt like blaming another woman for his behaviour.

You know, I have learnt about male partners that some are good, and others are not. It helps when doing male advocacy training and working with men, to understand that there are men like that. They may tell you in the training that they don't beat their wives, but there may be emotional abuse, which many men don't accept or realise that they are doing – including through being unfaithful and through other actions and words.

“The point of sharing all this now is that I want other women to know that they can change too, like I did. They don't need to feel ashamed if they make mistakes when they are hurt because of their husband's infidelity.”

My custom says I should go and fight for my husband, no matter what. But the Government law says no you can't, it's a crime. So I learned. Custom and people around will tell you, go and fight for him, that is your husband. And they will encourage you to, because they feel like you have the legal right, with bride price being paid over for you already. But in actual fact, if he womanises, you have no right to say, why are you womanising, I am your wife? He doesn't need your permission to womanise, he can just go and do it.

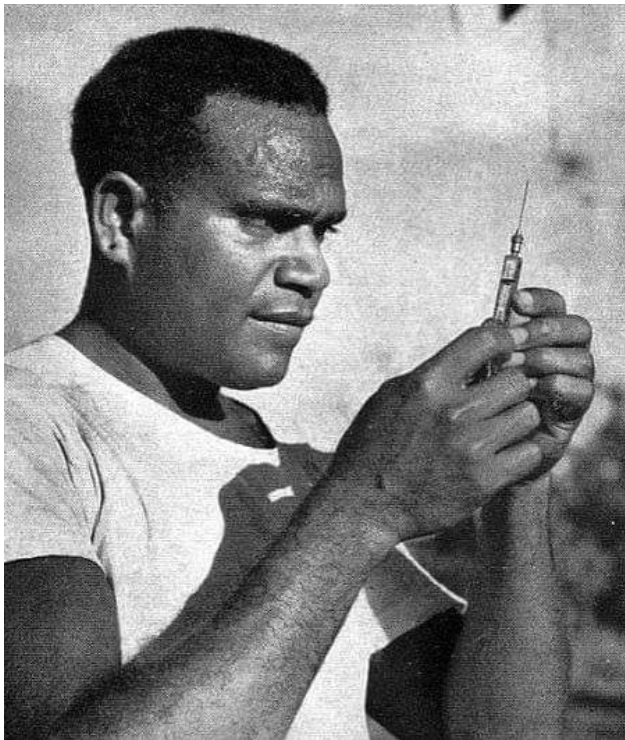
That custom of fighting over a man has died a bit – there are only a few people who do that now, and more and more people know that it is not right. But even today in the rural areas, people still encourage women to go fight for him. I had to learn the lesson the hard way, and I was poor at that time. And then when doing this work and I look back, even in 1992 when I was doing this work, he was still womanising then. But at that time also I didn't know law, so I didn't do any counter-claims for adultery, even though the law was there for me to do that. I had no legal awareness.

The point of sharing all this now is that I want other women to know that they can change too, like I did. They don't need to feel ashamed if they make mistakes when they are hurt because of their husband's infidelity.

So when do you think you realised that it was the man's fault, and that we shouldn't blame women?

It came more and more as I worked at VWC, as I became more and more to understand domestic violence and the dynamics. You know, don't fight other women, this man knows he is married, so

why is he going and playing around? That is an abuse of women. Also, I need women to come with me to support this work on violence against women, so I don't want any animosity towards other women.



*Merilyn's values come from her father and mother: Basil Leodoro and Eleanor Rose Leo
Merilyn's father was also a leader and trailblazer - one of the first ni-Vanuatuan men to go to medical school in Fiji
Merilyn's mother had an "open-door" policy, and was always available to help others*

This is off the topic, but I want to ask how men feel when the women fight over them? Do they expect that?

Yes, all do. They think, if you don't fight for me, then what is wrong with you? But for me, at that time, it was more out of a lot of frustration. He was hiding, and this woman that I fought, she knew very well that we were married, and I told her at that time: you were a flower lady at my marriage, if you didn't know he was married, I would have told you. And she was with the Women's Affairs section at that time, and they did a lot of things together at that time. My husband lied that he was going to Ambae for the anniversary of his father's death, but he didn't, he flew somewhere else to be with her. But after that incident, I became good friends with her. And she wasn't the only one, so that was another thing – how many times could I go and fight people?

I couldn't leave him because no-one would help me then. If my father was alive then, I could have left, because my father would have heard me and helped me. If my husband had asked for the bride price to be reimbursed, I would not have been able to do that. So I had to continue to live with him and his controlling behaviour. His status as a Chief and a Member of Parliament made it harder, because people believed that men should control women.

So the direction that you took in life, does that come from being a survivor?

And also, it comes from my father, because he was helping other people in his work. And my mother was always there to help other people also. Their house was like an open door policy, people were always there, and she looked after us that way. Certainly as a survivor I knew the need and

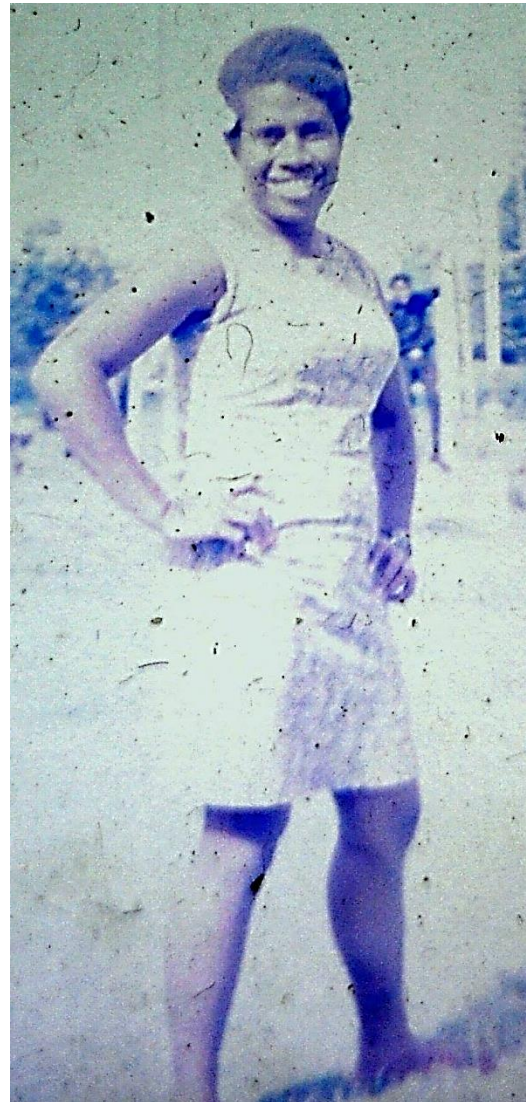
understood what VAWC was. I understood the need to just be able to share what is really happening to you.

When you were all fighting for Independence, it must have been such a formative time. You said yesterday that your feeling for your country was a motivator for you, the sense of being a new country, and that you had the power and responsibility to do something – do you want to say anything more about that?

The thing that is still with me, is that I felt how colonialism treated us. So I get angry when people from outside the country don't understand that. I knew the struggles of that. I got through how we were treated by the French. Places were burnt. We worked at night sewing flags, hiding ourselves to do that because they might come and catch us. I felt those things, and I knew how it was difficult to get nationhood, because I went through a time when I was not even a citizen of our country.

So I value that Independence and nationhood, I want to celebrate it. Being a citizen of our country, I don't want someone else to abuse me. Not again. The sense of being alive and being free in the nation means more to me than anything else. I think people who have not gone through that don't realise that. On 29th November 1977, that was when they fired with tear gas right where Fung Kuei is now. I was shivering. You know those kinds of feelings, and it is still with us. So I love my country, it is that kind of national thinking.

I can make the link between the struggle of a survivor and the need to have "freedom" from domestic violence, and the struggle for our nationhood, and the need for freedom from colonisation and the control that we experienced during the Condominium.^{xxxv}



Merilyn in her British Secondary School uniform, 1968 (the British Secondary School was later re-named as Malapoa College)

"I can make the link between the struggle of a survivor and the need to have freedom from domestic violence, and the struggle for our nationhood, and the need for freedom from colonisation and control ..."

That also must have been a factor in keeping you with your husband?

For a while. He was at the centre of the movement. But I think I was there more because I respected the sanctity of marriage, and I couldn't share freely with other people. And I was poor, with no money and no property.

When you say you remember how colonialism treated ni-Vanuatu, did you observe that in school, or in the way your father or mother were treated?

At the time I didn't mentally process it. But later I knew about my father being paid almost nothing while he was there. I came to the British Secondary School from 1966 up to 1970. I got my education from there. Yes, our principal was white, but that thinking was never there, we accepted it. I was learning and getting my education, and not looking back at how we were treated. For me, my awareness came more afterwards, after I left school, and went into the struggle, and learning a little bit more.

So what do you think about colonialism now? Do you believe that external agencies are coming in to set the agenda to some extent?

I feel it. I feel it and I think that I have to control myself more now, rather than telling them: "I don't want you to treat me this way". I am afraid I might say that. At the beginning, at time of the Independence struggle, I had some hot spots against the French. But over the years until now, I don't have anything against them. But if you were in that struggle at that time, you felt that heat, and the bad things that were happening just made you feel that way. Now I have gotten over that, but I don't like this mentality I get sometimes. Understand us better. If they don't respect me, I am alert to it.

So in a way, yes, I want to show people that we can, as a ni-Vanuatu and a ni-Vanuatu woman, we can do things ourselves. VWC is a change agent, we can see that, we can prove that. And I say when we go into the workshops with men: "This organisation was founded by ni-Vanuatu women." I want to say that all the time, just to raise that profile of ni-Van women. We can do it, we don't need people from outside to come. And that is that sense of colonialism that is still with me.

"And I say when we go into the workshops with men: 'This organisation was founded by ni-Vanuatu women.' I want to say that all the time, just to raise that profile of ni-Van women. We can do it, we don't need people from outside to come. And that is that sense of colonialism that is still with me."

And does that help when you are working with men?

Yes, and it helps because some leaders and some people think, you didn't do it by yourself, you did it with white people. I still say that also when they think we are spoon-fed by DFAT. I'm saying no, they listen to me. Because a lot of CSOs are going that way. I say: "no, DFAT and Australian Aid don't dictate to me". I think we are the only ones saying that. I appreciate and I always acknowledge the money that is coming, but it doesn't mean that DFAT or Australian Aid tells me what to do in my program. I have a contract, but that contract is mutually agreed.

So when you say that VWC was founded by ni-Vanuatu women, does it help to bring the men along with you?

I think so. Some men do ask about this, and they want you to justify yourself. And of course Juliet, you may be the only one white woman who comes into that office. People will ask, how many white women do you have? And I think that is one thing that you see, that I don't have that. I had one at

the very beginning, and I could have had more. I have been proposed volunteers and I did not get them, and I think it is this thing from the beginning. I want to show them, I am still wanting them to see, that we can do it! We are an independent nation, we can do it. And if the men keep suggesting that, it means, do they think we cannot do it? And that is why maybe, when things are given to me, such as knowledge and information, I am thinking, how can we do that here, better, the way we want it to be done? And for VWC, how can we do it and modify it to benefit our aims?

“And that is why maybe, when things are given to me, such as knowledge and information, I am thinking how can we do that here, better, they way WE want it to be done? And for VWC, how can we do it and modify it to benefit our aims?”

It raises a question for me. You have always wanted to do everything yourself, but not all people are like that, and I wonder if that is because of the Independence struggle?

However we can do it, with outside information and help, but let us do it together. Don't do it for me, don't impose ideas or strategies that may fail. That is the meaning of Independence, and doing it yourself.

So now to feminism. How did you first come across the idea of feminism?

All the above, and learning. I was a feminist but I didn't know, until I was told what feminism was. And I think I said to myself, well I am already a feminist. But I need to show it, and I suppose this work is part of that.



Participants from across the Pacific Region at the 8th Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women meeting, Fiji, 2018 (Marilyn is front row, third from left)

So did you first hear about feminism from FWCC, or from a national movement?

Probably from reading, but maybe also from national sources, from people like Grace Molisa and Hilda Lini who went to overseas forums. But it wasn't clear. And up until today, it isn't spoken about or mentioned, it isn't articulated that "I am a feminist" in this country. It is still seemingly a dirty word. I also learned about feminism from FWCC, later on – through their Regional Training Program, the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women, conferences, and from just doing VWC work. I also learned about feminism during those years when there was a lot of talk about

feminism from regional meetings, such as SPC women's meetings and the global women's meetings I mentioned earlier – I think that has gone away. But the Pacific Regional Women's Network Against Violence Against Women is still talking about it now.

For me it means you are supporting women and women's rights and women's stand. But it doesn't mean that you have to wear pants, or skirts or whatever. Look, you know, people are so afraid of it. So I think that I was a feminist, but I didn't know that I was, if I can put it that way. But I believe in it, and VWC is a feminist organisation. We are reaching out to women, we want to support them, and work with them and address abuses of their rights.

What about the way that the organisation works, such as the inclusiveness – is that informed by feminism, or is that more all your other learning?

All our learning, including feminism. Because even if we don't use that word, we are that. We want to work with women, we want to promote their rights and we are. We want happy lives for them. I want to make it clear that VWC is a feminist organisation and a human rights organisation.

Anything more to say about feminism in Vanuatu, or feminism in the organisation? Does it matter that it is not spoken about?

Feminism in Vanuatu is not spoken up for. Gradually, people began to talk about gender equality, but now there is confused messaging on gender equality. Feminism is not even talked about, or maybe not understood. We are not using that language, or we are using that language but in a different way. We say we want to support women's rights, and people accept that. There is just not enough information on feminism, and maybe in our work we should focus on that, but we haven't included it very much in our workshops, and we would need to explain it in Bislama. But generally, there is still a lot of gender discrimination, and we should be talking about that and women's rights, and we do.

*"I was a feminist, but I didn't know it until I was told what feminism was. ...
For me, feminism means you are supporting women and women's right and women's
stand."*

In addition to the organisational/work challenges, this type of commitment to women's rights and EVAWC often brings personal challenges along with it. So I am not sure if you want to say anything about what may have happened to you, and what has helped you to keep going through personal attacks, and how families may suffer?

I am asking this question because young women who do this type of work are still likely to face these types of challenges. Is there anything you would like to share on that? They may not face exactly the same things, but generally women who do this work are personally attacked.

Not only me personally, but for my staff, the first personal challenge for many is getting their men on board, and they go through some violence before their partners understand the issue and support them in their work. With our strong rules about understanding and committing to non-violence, zero tolerance to violence, they do get to understand that my man cannot beat me. But also, how to talk to their men about the issue, and how to use their own personal relationship to influence other people, by explaining things: "We don't fight because she is working here, and it is not right".

Another personal challenge for me is that my family is without me a lot of the time if I am travelling a lot for this work, nationally, locally and also regionally. I put this work in front of me, and my family comes later. So sometimes I find personal challenges there, with my partner thinking, ok I have got time to play around with other women, because she is not around. It hurts, it is painful, but how do you work on that? You continue to suffer, and you continue to find ways how to work on that, because I still love my job. And I think, I still have my job, and I love to work for these women, I want to help these women, and I want to achieve things.



Merilyn at her desk early in 2020

How about the other staff? Have they faced a lot of pressure, if not from their husbands, then from their other relatives, asking why they are doing this work or accusing them of breaking up families? They have a hard job at work, and then they have a hard job at home from their aunts, uncles, cousins.

Yes, all of us have faced that thinking, and also from their church communities. For example, Maie Biagk was an elder in the Presbyterian Church, and Louise Nauka was from the Seventh Day Adventist Church. They were both asked: are you doing things against the church, or the church beliefs, or traditional beliefs? Are you breaking up homes, are you allowing or doing divorce? That thinking was very much there until very recently. But I think that has changed now, that thinking that we are breaking up families. That has changed due to all the awareness we have done, and the church coming around to believe in us. Maybe there are still some people who think that way. We have not changed everybody.

A personal challenge for me and my staff also, is spending a lot of time away from home, because of this work, because we love it, and we want to do it, and we have planned activities to be doing. But on the other hand, with that, many of the staff benefit from this work personally, including me – in terms of building our capacity, knowledge capital, monetary, we can build our homes, and other things like that. So this work also benefits the staff and the communities where we are living.

So do staff still suffer from their relatives questioning why they are doing this work, or has that also changed?

In the early days staff used to struggle with that, up until about 10 years ago, but I am not hearing very much of that now. We are also very clear that if our staff come in with these things, we care about them and we want our staff to share if they are facing things like that, and we want them to be fully functioning when they are at work. So if there are staff going through issues in their personal relationships, we give them time off, to work through things with their partners, and then they come back. If they are in difficult personal relationships, we want to address that. We are the only organisation doing that. We have strong rules about zero tolerance to violence, and not having affairs, because we cannot have our staff fighting in their communities. This is important for the status of this organisation, and for the trust in this organisation.

“If there are staff going through issues in their personal relationships, we give them time off ... We are the only organisation doing that.”

I think it is unusual for an organisation to give so much support to women who are going through violence and other personal difficulties.

Yes, time off is needed to work on it. Some have moved on with their relationships. But we also had a program, by including partners in our male advocacy workshops. On the other hand, it is beneficial that staff bring home their salary and most try to save the daily allowances they receive when they travel away from home. This income has helped their whole families.

I would like it to be very clear, that doing this work is not easy. There are a lot of personal challenges, because it is a very hard issue that we are dealing with. Counsellors are going back home every day, and having these issues on their minds. Also in community education, being confronted by men who are in leadership positions, can be difficult.



Banner made by participants at a VWC community awareness workshop on Epi Island, May 2016

What is the secret to remaining strong in the face of these challenges, if you imagine you are giving advice to someone younger?

Know the cultural ethics. If leaders in the community challenge you, you know those ethics when you go in and you try to be nice and talk to them. But if they treat you badly, you don't fight back, you come back and talk about it. You are on a professional visit, not a personal tour, and then let us deal with it on a professional level.

I am thinking that this situation can be very scary, and some may want to give up.

Yes. But the thing is, we have to deal with it quickly, and talk about it quickly with the particular staff, and let them talk about it. There are mentoring aspects to that, and finding strategies for how to respond, and maybe intervention from senior staff is needed. Don't give up. But you need to have a commitment, and know that you are right to work on EVAWC.

"Don't give up. But you need to have a commitment, and know that you are right to work on the elimination of violence against women and children."

Merilyn's tips about what has guided her as an organisational leader

1. It is important to know each staff very well, and her capacity, including her skills and her knowledge of her own community.
2. It helps to reflect on the locations that the organisation plans to visit, why you are choosing that location, and what the staff may face there.
3. It is important to send staff who come from that community or island, because they will know the specific customs in that area
4. Very importantly, prepare the staff well, by discussing what she should do in that rural area, and what opposition or challenges she may face during the visit
5. Training for each staff is paramount, and finding skilled staff is helpful

What do you think are the main issues and challenges that you are personally faced with now, in your own role in VWC?^{xxxvi}

I am 69 this year (2019). I hope people don't think that I want to stay in this position all the time. I don't want to be here in the Coordinator's position forever. I worry about implementation of the work. I cannot do it all. The staff cannot rely on someone else, they have to rely on themselves.

There will come a time when you have to let go?

I want to. I want to straight away. But the thing is, I don't want anyone to let VWC down. But I don't want to do this all the time. That's the fear. I don't want people to think that it will be only good if Merilyn is there.

Has anyone said that?

No, but I don't want people to think that. Some people are asking, how long am I going to be there for? Some rural people, they ask it in different ways. I want this to be my last year, and after the PDD is done, then I want to sit at the back for the next phase. I really truly want to sit at the back, and I might not even be there.

You don't know what the future holds when you get to this age.

DFAT believes in me now. But I want them to believe in the new leadership of VWC. Sending Vola to Australian National University is a way that DFAT is showing me that they believe in her, to give her the scholarship. DFAT has been talking about succession plans.

One of the difficult things about phasing out of a role like yours is that people will not do things in exactly the same way as you. They might do things well, but differently. People have to learn and even fail, and learn by doing things themselves. What do you think?

I am happy that the leadership of the VWC should be with the management team, to keep that collective management going. Because one person cannot do it all on their own, you need everybody else in there. Collective management has to be there. It spreads the knowledge and the opportunity to take responsibility and be accountable.

The main part of interview was conducted with Merilyn Tahi in 2019, with follow-up discussions held in late 2021.

In August 2020 Merilyn suddenly became very ill.

In October 2020 Merilyn initiated a formal transition process for VWC to prepare for a new Coordinator, and she resigned from the role of VWC Coordinator in February 2021.

Tatavola Matas was appointed to the role of VWC Coordinator in March 2021.

Merilyn Tahi is currently Technical Advisor to VWC.



The Australian High Commissioner and her staff joined VWC celebrations for National Women's Day in May 2021, where Merilyn's many achievements were celebrated

Chapter 2:

What was it like then? Co-founders and staff talk about the early days

Elizabeth Mermer: I took a stand

What are some of your most important moments, achievements and challenges with VWC?

I remember once, standing in front of the Councillors and Chiefs in one island of Vanuatu. Their body language told me that they believed a woman has no place here – what is her custom and culture for her to come and address us? The belief and culture for Vanuatu was that a woman has no place within the nakamal to come and address the issue of violence against women. I took a stand, and I tried to educate different community leaders on why it is important not to use violence against women.

I gave an example from a line in the bible, saying that men and women are equal and have different responsibilities: “A woman is your helper, and she is not your punching bag, or like tomatoes to squash when men are angry”. Someone asked me: “When God created Adam and Eve, who ate the apple from the forbidden tree?” He even pointed at me. I answered: “Where were you when I ate the apple? It is your responsibility to come and stop me from eating the apple. At the end God spoke His anger to who? Me or Adam?”. A church elder stood up and said: “God allowed Eve to eat the apple because He has His reasons and today we are here to address it.”

We learned from our experiences. When we went to Pentecost Island, I started to present gifts to the chief first (nasara), so that they would accept me as a woman to stand in front and conduct the workshop with community members. I gave them examples about different forms of abuse of children – physical, mental, economic abuse and other forms of abuse. I told them that it is not good to leave children alone at home, especially when they need the care and love of their parents. It is a form of violence against children. Through our work, we were determined to advocate to somehow change the mindset of communities, and especially parents, so that they would teach their children with love and respect. We hoped the children would become champions of change after they had grown up, and that they would teach their partners differently in the future.



Co-founder of VWC, Elizabeth Mermer

“We learned from our experiences.”

When we went to the field and women came forward to lodge various complaints, men in the villages weren't happy and started to be aggressive towards us. We had to stand strong and fight them with words, so that they can understand that women are to be respected, and not to use violence against them. Before, men and parents thought that it is lawful to hit women and children as a way to teach them, and men always said that they had already paid for women (bride price).

We faced many challenges in establishing the organization. When we started, there were only two of us, although many volunteers soon joined in. We saw that the women who came forward with domestic violence reports to us in the beginning, became our supporters, and shared our work with different communities. That is how it grew and grew to where we are today. All the volunteers who came in to help were not paid. We had to pay these volunteers with our own pocket money and also bring food for them.



An early march organised by VWC

Me and Marilyn had to struggle in the beginning to change the mentality of men in the different communities we went to. We often use radio platforms to disseminate information to people across Vanuatu. We faced attempts so assault us, but I never gave up. I stood firm and faced all the men with all the courage that I had. If they started to lift their hands against me, I shouted to them and I told them: "If you touch me, be ready to face the consequences. Only one person has the right to touch me, and that is my husband. He never hits me, because he respects me". The men became afraid and told everyone that this office was on fire. I had to defend the VWC office, because we had many outreach visits into communities, and the women in different islands were relying on us. The reputation of the office is vital. We had to stand firm, so the media will not paint a bad image of the organisation.

"Before, men and parents thought that it is lawful to hit women and children as a way to teach them, and men always said that they had already paid for women (bride price)."

During our time, many aid donors, governments, and Members of Parliament turned down our requests to finance our work. We talked to local authorities, saying that women are important within the society.

"I stood firm and faced all the men with all the courage that I had. ...

The men became afraid and told everyone that this office was on fire. I had to defend the VWC office, because we had many outreach visits into communities, and the women in different islands were relying on us. The reputation of the office is vital. We had to stand firm, so the media will not paint a bad image of the organisation."

What is the future for VWC?

Today new staff have come in and carried out our legacies with pride, and we are proud to see the organization grow and our dream become a reality. Many women rely on VWC today. Slowly men in different communities are seeing the importance of our work, and beginning to understand the rights of women. They are becoming more hesitant to abuse women, because now they have come to know the consequences of this behaviour.

Men and women now know the rights of women, and we thank everyone involved in VWC, as well as church leaders, community leaders and male advocates for their tireless efforts to be a vehicle for providing information on the human rights of women, men and children. Everyone has rights.

Our work must start at home, with respect for our partners, including their likes and dislikes. After all the work, I retired and enjoyed my time with my husband before he passed.



Janet Saksak Boedovo (right) and Elizabeth Mermer at
FWCC's First Pacific Regional Workshop on Women and Violence, August 1992

Janet Saksak Boedovo: With VWC, women are safe at home

The most important moment in VWC's history was the setting up of the office after myself, Elizabeth Mermer and Marilyn Tahi returned from the first Regional Workshop on Domestic Violence Against Women in Fiji.

During that time there are only a few members in the committee to discuss the running of the office and also office space and requests for funding. We were so fortunate to have the co-founder Mrs Marilyn Tahi as one of the well-known leaders in the country to manage the office. We struggled for the office to be established. A few women were willing to work to assist victims coming for help.

One of the greatest achievements over the years, was getting a lawyer to help women. VWC now has more than one lawyer and this service is provided at no cost to assist women with domestic violence and other issues affecting women. The centre has appointed a lot of CAVAW representatives in most islands too, this is a great achievement.

VWC has a very close working relationship with the police, especially the Family Protection Unit. The centre has selected many male Police Officers over the years to attend workshops on violence against women in Fiji. Counsellors were also trained in Fiji, and located on other islands.

People need to know the history of the centre, why it is important and what the centre has done – to know that they are part of the centre and what they have achieved. Through the centre, women are safe in their home. It is also essential to know what the rate of domestic violence is, and in what age groups. I think this book will help a lot of women to seek help from the centre.

Now, people feel free to ask questions to help other women who have domestic issues, but who were not able to raise their issues before. To conclude, I recommend that this book will help a lot if they read and can be translated also in local common language for women in rural areas to read and understand what the centre is carrying out every day. Finally, I would like to congratulate the management of the centre for having free lawyers for women and a safe house to accommodate women and children.



Co-founder of VWC, Janet Saksak Boedovo

"I would like to congratulate the centre for having free lawyers for women and a safe house to accommodate women and children."

Rolengas Lolo: Any work for women, I will do it

Before VWC was born

I was there before Vanuatu Women Centre was born. I was working as Community Development Worker in the Women's Interest Section under the Department of Education in the British National Service from 1974 to 1979. In 1980 during the Independence of Vanuatu from the New Hebrides I was Head of Women's Interest and then we changed the name Women's Interest to Women's Affairs. I held the position as Head of Women's Affairs looking after the affairs of the women in the newly independent country and Government.

When I was in the Government Grace Molisa and I participated in the first CEDAW workshop in Cook Islands in 1992. My office organised the national conference of Church women leaders and Presidents of women's clubs from around the country to set up Vanuatu National Council of Women (VNCW). It was set up on 15th May 1980. Today we celebrate National Women's Day on 15th May every year to mark the formation of VNCW.



Rolengas Lolo: "I was there before VWC born"

In 1985 I was Acting Director for Social and Community Development, Youth and Sports and Head of Woman's Affairs at the same time. I was among three other women who held the position of Acting Director in the newly independent country. Roslyn Tor was Director of Government Training Centre, Touriman Heinz was Director of Hospital Administration, and Roslyn Batagi was Director of Postal Services and Telecommunication.

In 1991 I left the Government to work at VNCW, which is an umbrella organisation and non-government organisation (NGO). At VNCW we structured the organisation right down to the village level: VNCW, Provincial Councils of Women, Island Councils of Women, Area Councils of Women, Wards Councils of Women, and Village Councils of Women, women's clubs and church women's groups.

As the women's umbrella organisation, any correspondence relating to women came through VNCW or the Women's Affairs Department in the Government. In 1992 we received a fax message from the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) to send four women to a regional training on violence against women. I sent four women's names: Merilyn Tahi as President of Port Vila Town Council of Women, Elizabeth Mermer as VNCW National President and President of Mautfer (Efate) Island Council of Women, Janet Saksak as Female Police Officer, and Hellen Michelle as Head of Women's Affairs. Unfortunately, Hellen did not make it. The three women attended four weeks training in Suva.

It was not an easy job to set up a woman's organisation

After their return to Vanuatu, the three ladies held their first meeting at the Rossi Restaurant with the Port Vila Town Council of Women's committee and members. I was in that meeting too. They reported on their training, and put up a proposal to set up a committee and an office. All those present at the meeting agreed, including VNCW, the Efate Island Council of Women and Port Vila Town Council of women members. So Marilyn and Elizabeth worked at it while Janet went back to her job in the Police Force. It was not an easy job for Marilyn to do, as some women leaders, chiefs and church leaders were against it being setting up.

I recall the time when we were talking about setting up VNCW, people said we were thinking of building a brothel or a white House in Vanuatu. They said that if we set up an office, we will surely be allowing a lot of women to divorce. We did not let their words stop us. Marilyn continued to go on and explain why we needed to set up the Vanuatu Women's Centre.

"... some leaders, chiefs and church leaders were against VWC being set up. ... We did not let their words stop us."

I left VNCW in 1996 and in 1998 I was asked by Marilyn to join her team as Finance Administrator at VWC. I saw many clients coming in and going out and could see that Marilyn had it all planned out. Every idea that she had, she always talked it over in a staff collective meeting and asked our views, so that everyone would know and help to build it into a program activity. I was there when she was planning who to be in a committee of Trustees and Project Coordinating Committee and I nominated some names. After every staff collective decision, we followed through by setting up the activities and programs discussed, for example setting up a CAVAW in Luganville that later became Sanma Counselling Centre and the Lenakel CAVAW that later became Tafea Counselling Centre.



Campaigns began early: volunteers and supporters on the first march through Port Vila

Early achievements of VWC

I remember that VWC played an important role in convincing the Government to ratify CEDAW, before attending the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. Marilyn went to the NGO Forum held alongside that conference as a Beneath Paradise representative, while Grace Molisa led five of us including Marilyn Temakon, Mary Lini, Yelo Ruth, Lopanga Daniel from Epi and I at the NGO Forum. I also remember back then we first began to talk about having a Family Protection Law and thinking about having a lawyer at VWC. RRRT came and gave us training on paralegal issues and we translated FWCC's 7 legal brochures into Bislama. In 1999 I remember Juliet Hunt came and helped us design the first Project Design Document. I knew about Juliet when I was at VNCW and she was working for the Australian Freedom from Hunger Campaign.

Early days of the Penama Counselling Centre

I left VWC in 2001 to go back to Ambae, my home island in Penama Province. I joined in with women in the churches with Church activities, and set up women's cooperatives helping market women.

In 2017 Merlyn came to me and asked me if I am still interested in the work of VWC. I said any work to do for women, I am interested, I will do it. She said we will be setting up Penama Counselling Centre and you will be the Project Officer.

"At first, we were faced with some threatening talk and told not to go inside communities, but now nearly every community welcomes us."

I was glad and so fortunate to come back to dealing with women's issues, even though I had been working on women's development. Penama Counselling Centre (PECC) is the last Provincial Counselling Centre in the country to be set up. There are three islands – Ambae, Maewo and Pentecost. Penama men always talk about RESPECT especially on Pentecost. We have been to many villages with our community awareness, mobile counselling and special events activities. PECC has been in Penama for 5 years now and I can say that most men know us, and when they see us they always say OLKETA LO VAELENS; after that, they would laugh and walk away.



Penama Counselling Centre (PECC) and VWC staff and local leaders provide talks on violence against women on International Women's Day, March 2018

One of the major breakthroughs that PECC made with our community awareness was when I said domestic violence is UTE ATEN IMWAMWA. This means that all that happens underneath your house is a crime – such as physical violence, emotional violence, sexual violence, financial violence, stalking, threatening, and damage to property. No questions are ever asked when I say this, because

on Pentecost you have no right to say anything about someone's house, because men believe that is his own business and property. At first, we were faced with some threatening talk and told not to go inside communities with high-ranking chiefs, but now nearly every community welcomes us.

From an idea to an organisation

When I came back in 2017 and look back over the years from 2001 to 2020, I can only say that VWC has grown over the years. The whole of Vanuatu knows what VWC and the Branches are doing. It has grown from an idea into an organisation with its branches all over the country.

Vanuatu really needs this organisation because every island in the country thinks that women are not important – one can clearly see that more boys are going to school than girls, there are no woman in the Provincial Councils, and no woman member of Parliament.

Vanuatu Women Centre is the only Human Rights Organisation in the country. I believe that with VWC networks of partners we will be able to make bigger changes in the people's attitudes and lives.

"Stand up strong VWC, SCC, MCC, TCC, TOCC and PECCI!"

Annie Philemon: VWC broke down barriers

Vanuatu Women's Centre has done a lot of work in empowering women. VWC broke down barriers with men to be able to work with the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Public Solicitor's Office and the Vanuatu Police Force. They and the Government put court orders in place, but this is due to the work of VWC. The Government and these offices had not ever read CEDAW, even though it had existed.

It is VWC that implemented CEDAW, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and gender equality. VWC is the organisation that went out to talk about these issues to the grassroots, but more needs to be done. Everyone should talk more about CEDAW articles.

The Government ratified these conventions in Parliament. That was the Parliament's role. But until today, VWC are the ones who have done the most to implement CEDAW and empower women.



Annie Philemon was formerly Project Officer of the Sanma Counselling Centre

Kathleen Mabon Bani: It all began from women's experiences

It all began from women's experiences. Women who experienced violence from non-members of family and domestic violence amongst family members. Before 1992, women suffered silently with the acceptance that violence and domestic violence is okay and it's part of family life. When women and children suffered severity, they were confused and were ignored by family, friends, neighbourhoods and even a man they much love. It was like living in the shadow with confusion and fear.

Lights came in when women and children became very uncomfortable about cruelty that was imposed on them.

It seems like yesterday when we walked the survivors to the Police station for the first time in 1995 and male police officers would reluctantly approach the survivor's and say: "Olsem wanem? !Wan moa family problem bagegen!". The tone of the Officers' voice and their approaches often felt very uncomfortable. Something's got to be done about this approach. Women needed help but it was difficult at first, with very little training on domestic violence issues in those days. We lobbied and stood our ground that the act of violence is inhuman treatment.



Kathleen Mabon Bani, Sanma Counselling Centre Project Officer

"We lobbied and stood our ground that the act of violence is inhuman treatment."

I was seen as "rubbish young woman" because I accompanied women to the Police station to seek help in dangerous family issues. Seen as a rubbish woman for poking my nose into couple's private life, even though I did not reach out to them at their home but they made their own way to seek help from Vanuatu Women Centre. I definitely believed and understood from the early days of Vanuatu Women's centre that "it would be everybody's business if a survivor of domestic violence died".

I was once stopped by a male person on my way to the shop who then asked: why a good-looking young girl wants to work with older women who deal with family issues? Should there be other job opportunity, you apply. I was not shaken by this question from a **dump thought**. Nevertheless, it felt good to lobby for what is good though it seemed awkward on the inside of men and some women in those days.

The fact that kept motivating me to continue working for Vanuatu Women's Centre was the teaching my beloved mother taught me called "wowotagan" in my mother tongue - talking family issues which I later realised in my teenage years as "warnings talks on domestic violence".

Despite being called “rubbish woman”, despite being seen by men as “working for an inappropriate organisation”, I am proud of my inner pearl that kept on shining out for women whose lives have already been taken away by violence, women who are currently seeking help from Vanuatu Women’s Centre and for the future generation of girls and older women who are and will be vulnerable to be exposure to Violence.

Girls, women and children who are survivors of violence – you deserve a better life, you deserve to enjoy life to the fullness. Shake and dust off violence from your shoulder and use it as your door mat.



*SCC has provided support to the northern provinces of Vanuatu for many years.
Kathleen Mabon Bani (SCC Project Officer) with Rolengas Lolo (PECC Project Officer)
and Sharline Sarai (VWC CAVAW Officer) at the 2021 provincial training of Penama CAVAWs*

“Girls, women and children who are survivors of violence – you deserve a better life, you deserve to enjoy life to the fullness.

Shake and dust off violence from your shoulder and use it as your door mat.

! Hooray! ! Hooray! ! Hooray!”

Kathleen Mabon Bani: A woman of courage

*Born of courageous woman
 Courageous woman nursed you to be courageous
 Self-motivated to be courageous
 Developed yourself to be a strong courageous woman
 A courageous woman*

*You teach courageous young women to be courageous as you
 You mentor courageous young women
 You train courageous young women
 You are courageous and walked the talk
 A courageous woman*

*A Courageous woman of influence
 A Courageous woman with legacy
 A Courageous well-known national leader*

*A Courageous woman sacrifice for Nation's sake
 A Courageous woman sacrifice for women's sake
 A Courageous woman sacrifice for children's sake
 A Courageous woman sacrifice to promote harmonious family relationships.
 A Courageous woman*

*Legacy of a Courageous woman I inherit by grace
 Legacy of a courageous woman I applaud
 Legacy of a Courageous woman I admire
 Legacy of a Courageous woman I will adhere
 Legacy of a Courageous woman I will uphold*

A courageous, motivator, mentor, influencer and leader

Written by Kathleen Mabon Bani in honour of Marilyn Tahigogona's achievements for National Women's Day, 15 May 2021

VWC song: Igud yumi wok tugeta

*Igud yumi wok tugeta blong stopem vaelens
 Stopem faet, stopem rep, stopem incest
 Blong ino kam antap long kaontri ia Vanuatu
 Helpem mi, mi helpem yu
 Yumi stopem problem ia.*

*Oh plis, harem krae blong mama
 Stopem vaelens oltaem mama ikrae
 Oltaem mama isafa
 Plis stop, plis stop
 Plis stopem vaelens.*

This song was composed by participants in the first domestic violence workshop held by VWC in 1993 in Port Vila



Participants at the first VWC workshop in Port Vila sing the VWC song

Charlotte Wai: Mi no wantem ol nara woman I krae

Maret blong mi I bin arrange maret mo force maret

Mi maret long 1980 mi bin 19 years old. Maret blong mi I bin arrange maret mo force maret. Mi fesem fulap defdefren forms blong violence; phisicol violence, emtionel violence, finansol violence, sexual violence, coersive control mo paowa mo control.

Ol fasin ia I tekem mi go commitim succide mi bin tekem 17 chloroquine be mi bin strong mo mi laef bageken. Mi bin attempt blong hangem neck be I no bin go long tingting blong mi. Mi fesem violence long maret laef blong mi 17 years nao mi tekem descision blong mi se mi no wandem continu long laef ia mo mi nomo wandem ripitim laef ia bageken.

How mi bin coop wetem situation ia: Mi bin stap ripot long ol jif mo mifala I miting 12 taem be hasben I never change nao mi aot wetem ol pikinini blong mi long 1997 kam stap wetem tufala parents blong mi. Mi gat 4 pikinini 3 gel mo wan boy.

Dady blong ol pikinini blong mi I kam mo tekemaot ol pikinini long mi se hemi ol pikinini blong hem. Mi bin feel nogud tumas nao mi stap blong lukaotem help blong tekem bak ol pikinini blong mi mo endem maret laef ia.

Long manis May 1998 mi aot long ples blong mi long Centrol Pentecost mi go stap long North Pentecost wetem sam family we hemi klosap long Police station blong ol Police I helpem mi blong karemaot ol pikinini blong mi, mi stap 9 manis be oli no save helpem mi.

Long manis September 1999 mi go long Ambae mi stap wetem sam family klosap long Police station long Saratamata blong Police I helpem mi be I no hapen olsem tingting blong mi I wandem. Mi bin stap 9 manis be ol Police oli no helpem mi.

Long Manis July 2000 mi go long Santo, mi lukaotem help mo mi wandem endem maret laef ia mo tekemaot ol pikinini blong mi.

Long fes week blong manis August 2000, mi go long Sanma Counselling Center mo go long counselling. Long second week blong same manis ia nomo mi attendem wan week wokshop blong Vanuatu woman Center we Madame Coordinater Merelyn Tahi I bin kam ranem long Sanma Counselling Center.



Charlotte Wai, formerly Melsisi CAVAW member and now VWC Counsellor

“Mi bin stap ripot long ol jif mo mifala I miting 12 taem be hasben I never change ...”

During taem blong wokshop ia mi harem mo faenemaot se fulap samting we mi bin stap go tru long hem long 17 years maret laef blong mi hemi ol rabis fasin. Second tingting blong mi se mi really wandem long heart blong mi sapos mi go bak long aeland blong mi long Pentecost same wokshop ia bae I stap long Melsisi Centrol Pentecost 2.

“During taem blong wokshop ia mi harem mo faenemaot se fulap samting we mi bin stap go tru long hem long 17 years maret laef blong mi hemi ol rabis fasin.”

Wetem help blong SCC ol Police long Santo oli mekem wan leta igo kam long Chif blong dady blong ol pikinini blong mi se bae hemi karem bak ol pikinini blong mi I kambak long mi.

Fes week blong August 2000 mi follem leta blong Police mi kambak long Pentecost mo ol pikinini oli kambak long mi after long 3 years we mi lukaotem help be mi no faenem.

Long manis March 2001 mi toktok long Father Celestin Tari blong Ambae hem nao I lukaotem Parish Kansel blong Church Catholic Mission blong Melsisi, se mi bin attendem wokshop blong Vanuatu Woman Center long Santo we mi really wandem sapos hemi save agri wetem mi mo help se wokshop ia I save stap long Melsisi from I gat need blong hem.

Hemi bin andastanem mo agri mo talem se “Charlotte bae yu toktok igo long Vila long VWC se hemi oraet bae oli kam, be mi bae mi arangem wetem olgeta ol Community leader wetem ol Chifs se bae I gat wan wokshop olsem from ol woman tu oli no save ol raets blong olgeta so I need blong gat wan wokshop olsem. Taem ia “QUEL JOIE DANS MON COEUR!!!.

Sentaem tu hemi talem long mi se “charlotte sapos yu tingting blong divos bae mi helpem yu from mi save se yu fesem tumas violence mo maret blong yu hemi wan force maret. Hemi helpem mi blong askem divos blong mi igo long Tribunal blong Church Catholic long Fiji.

Mi toktok long Coordinata Madame Merelyn Tahi nao hemi sendem Miriam Bule mo Jeanette Kaltang (Kaluat) tufala I kam ranem wokshop blong wan week we I bin 50 partipants long la Mission blong Melsisi.

“Long manis May 2002 I gat wan miting blong ol jifs blong Centrol Pentecost 2, “CHANCE WANTAEM” mi pussum bill ia igo mo oli agri se bae i gat Komiti blong Violence Agains Woman long Centrol Pentecost from I gat need blong hem.”

Manis March 2002 ol chifs blong Centrol Pentecost 2 oli tekem mi se bae mi secretary blong Eria Kansel blong olgeta. Long manis May 2002 I gat wan miting blong ol jifs blong Centrol Pentecost 2, “CHANCE WANTAEM” mi pussum bill ia igo mo oli agri se bae i gat Komiti blong Violence Agains Woman long Centrol Pentecost from I gat need blong hem.

Wan week after mi formem Komiti blong Vaelens Agains Women we mifala 6 members. Mifala I stap mekem awareness olbaot long ol community long Centrol Pentecost 2 go kasem long East Centrol Pentecost 2 mo celebretem ol Special Events.

Manis June 2002 Mi recivim wan pepa we Tribunal blong church Catholic blong Fiji I apruvum divos blong mi.

Mi wok klos wetem ol chifs everitaem. Be tu mi fesem Challenge blong wok. Blong go tru long East Pentecost I nogat rod blong truck, taem mifala i aot long melsisi long 7am mifala I holem lunch blong mifala, lunch long medel bush mo continu rod bageken kasem big-sea long 5pm.

Long 2005 **Father Celestin Tari** we I bin sapotem wok blong mifala bigwan I aot long Melsisi nao wan nara Father blong Tanna nem blong hem **Pere Jules Nako** I kam tekem ples blong hem.

Wetem **Jules Nako** fulap challenges, wantaem long preaching blong hem long Church Service hemi talem se “yufala ol woman taem yufala I wandem putum wan leader blong yufala, yufala I jusum gud ol woman we I nogat bakraon blong hem. Hemi bin talem olsem from mi **divos** be mi manege blong formem wan association blong ol woman Centrol Pentecost. Ol mama oli bin help mifala I buildim smol haus we oli weavim ol baskets blong olgeta mo hangem long haus ia mo samtaem mifala I holem I miting insaed, mifala ol members blong Cavaw mo Association blong ol woman, mo tu mi lukaotem branch blong Alliance Francaise insaed ia (Bibliothec), 2 004 -2007 mi stap kam mekem exhibition blong ol baskets, Mats, Tapa blong mifala long Alliance Francaise mo tekem back money blong ol mama igo bak long Pentecost mo sherem wetem olgeta.

Long namba 10/06/2007 Father Jules Nako i raetem wan leta I kam long mi se “**Charlotte, mifala I talem thank yu long yu from wok blong Vanuatu Women center we yu stap mekem long ples ia, be nao ia Parish Kansel I miting mo lukuk se bae yu tekemaot ofis blong Vanuatu woman Center we I stap long Eria blong Catholic mission long Melsisi before number 17 July 2007**”.

“Taem mi redim leta ia I jes givim mi pawa blong mi go luk hem face to face. Mi go talem long hem se ... long ples ia mifala 6 members blong komiti nomo mo mifala I wandem klinim ples blong mifala long Pentecost.”

Taem mi redim leta ia I jes givim mi pawa blong mi go luk hem face to face. Mi go talem long hem se, “Mi kam blong letem yu save se I nogat office blong Vanuatu woman Center long ples ia. Ofis blong Vanuatu woman Center I stap long Vila mo wan long ples blong yu long Tanna blong klinim Tanna, long ples ia mifala 6 members blong komiti nomo mo mifala I wandem klinim ples blong mifala long Pentecost. After long hemia i nomo gat toktok blong Father Jules ia bageken.

Mi go tru long defdefren challenges long stret family blong mi, samfala man we oli no really andastandem wok.

Wan Achivmen blong mi taem mi jes stat long CAVAW

Long manis December 2002 wan client I kam mo talem se hasband blo hem I lego hem 5 years nao. Klaen I struggle hem wan wetem 4 pikinini blong hem. Hemi lukaotem help olbaot I sendem sam jif we oli stap go long Santo, kansela blong province o any wan we eye blong klaen I fas long hem we I go long Santo I sendem olgeta se sapos oli faenem hasben blong hem samples long Canal bae oli passem toktok long hem bae hemi kam bak from ol pikinini blong hem.

Long wan Sande afternun mi go wash mi luk wan olfala I stap sidaon mo stap toktok long klaen se u trae hard from man blong yu, bae yu toktok long Charlotte ia nao. Mi sek we klaen I kam tru long haus blong mi mo mitufala I stori.

Afta long hemia mi tekem ship i go long Santo mo mi faenem evri information abaot Hasben blong klaen long wea ples hemi stap long hem long Malo mo hemi stap wetem hu mo long wanem Vilij. Mi karem every information ia finis mi go long Police station Police I raetem wan leta mo talem long mi

se “leta ia i gud se yu nomo bae yu karem igo from yu save situation blong ol pikinini ia wetem mami blong olgeta, nao mi se I stret from mi gat family long Malo.

Mi aot long Police station mi go long Naoneban mi tekem boat mi long Avunatari. Mi slip wetem sam family, tumoro blong hem mi tekem tufala couple we mi slip wetem tufala mifala igo blong lukaotem hasben blong klaen.

Mifala I kasem medel bush mifala I faenem wan man we hemi talem se hasben blong klaen I stap wetem hem. Mi passem leta blong Police long hem mo talem long hem se Mande morning yu tekem man ia I kam long Canal long Police station. Mifala I wokbaot kambak long Avunatari mo tumoro blong hem mi kambak long Canal.

Mande morning mi go long police station mi luk wan man wetem woman blong hem mo tufala pikinini blong tufala. Mi go luk olgeta mo askem se “yufala I kam long South santo?” woman blong hem I ansa se “mifala I kam long Malo” mi askem se bae yufala I pass long Police station nao hemi se “ mifala I kam from ol Police oli mekem wan leta I kam long hasben blong mi se bae i tekem wan man Pentecost we I stap wetem mitufala blong kam pass long Police.

Taem mi smile hemi se “yu nao yu ripotem man blong mi long Police” mi ansa se “be yutufala I stap holem hem yufala I save se hemi maret hemi aot long wife blong hem wetem 4 pikinini mo I stap wetem yutufala 5 yia nao”. Tufala I talem se mifala I ron I kam long town ia hemi luk truck I stop nao hemi ronwe. Police I sendem jif ia blong go faenem hem mo tekem I kam long Police Station. Mi aot mi kambak long 9am Police i se “yu kam man ia I stap ia finis.”



Only a few weeks after Tropical Cyclone Harold in March 2020, Charlotte arrives on Pentecost as part of VWC's mobile counselling team with relief supplies to distribute to remote villages devastated by the cyclone

Mifala 3 I sidaon Police se “mi toktok long hem finis mi faenemaot se hemi stap long Malo 5 years nao, hemi no live wetem woman be hemi wok be problem nao from hemi no gat contact wetem ol pikinini blong hem mo mami blong olgeta, so wanem nao tingting blong yu?”. Mi stori long man ia abaot situation blong ol pikinini blong hem wetem mami blong olgeta mo mi askem hem se “yu wandem kambak long ol pikinini blong yu? Or yu wandem oli kam long yu long Santo” hemi ansa se “mi wandem se bae oli kam luk mi long Santo”.

Mi talem long Police se sapos hemi wandem ol pikinini oli kam bae hemi kivim mi wan money nao ia blong mi go bak long Pentecost wan ship I pass mi pem rod blong olgeta mo mi putum olgeta I kam. Man I karemaot 7000vt kivim long Police, Police I kivim money long mi.

Mi kambak long Pentecost mi sendem toktok igo long vilig blong klaen blong kam luk mi. I kam mi storian long hem abaot rod blong mi mo mi talem se wan ship I aot long Vila I kam taem I kasem ples bae yufala I folem igo long Santo blong go luk dady blong yufala mo hemi givim money blong rod blong yufala. Taem ia I no gat mobile phone yet so mi bin lukluk long olgeta kasem long Santo mo go long tru long Malo.

Klaen I harem hemi happy tumas hemi no bin bilivim se mi faenem bak hasben blong hem. Mi talem long hem se bae yu redi nao, hemi go long vilj blong olgeta we hemi farawe tumas mo tekem ol pikinini ikam daon long solwota. Long afternun Ship Belama ipass mi putum olgeta long ship ia mo oli

go long Santo oli spel wetem wan family. Mi mekem rod wetem family ya taem mi stap yet long Santo se bae oli go spel smol wetem hem mo bae hemi putum olgeta long Naoneban blong go long Malo.

Long manis Jun 2018 mi go long santo mi pass long market mi luk klaen ia hemi happy mo hemi kam mi mo talem se "Wakin thankiu tumas nao ia mifala I mov ikam long Canal from mi mekem market mi pem graon blong mifala mo nao ia mi gat bel bageken. Mi talem long hem se "I gud ia yu bin wandem kambak long dady blong yufala be olsem ia nao nao hemi lav". Mi really happy long kes blong mi ia from I bin hard kes lelebet mo mi stap wokabot mi bin yusum own money blong mi so mi really happy.

Mi kam long Vila long January 2011

Long January 2011 mi kasem wan accident we hand blong mi I broke we stret brother blong mi I kilim brekem. Mi kam long hospital long Vila, VWC I helpem mi mo kipim mi long safe haus blong tri weeks. Mi aot long safe haus mi mekem back ol Exhibition blong mi long French Ambassade.

Mi laekem wok blong mi tumas from mi bin fesem violence be tru Vanuatu Women Center nao I mekem mi recover we I bin empawarem mi plante taem. Mekem se tude mi no laekem luk ol nara woman oli cry olsem we mi bin stap cry. Oli komitim sucide olsem mi bin traem be I no bin hapen. Mi stap long VWC heart blong mi hemi blong helpem ol nara woman. Nomata mi no tekem high education be mi laekem wok blong mi.



Charlotte and other staff and supporters on a march through Port Vila, March 2016

Mi save talem bageken se mi happy tede blong luk se ol Cavaw we oli stap nao ia oli gat Honorarium, money blong transport mo perdium. Be bifo mifala I no bin gat hemia.

Mifala I wok wetem ol Male advocate we I bin ol jif we oli bin attendem ol training blong VWC long Saratamata mo oli bin attendem ol Wok shops blong VWC long Vila. Oli bin help plante blong oli sevem ol FP oda. Group blong Cavaw ia mifala I putum nem blong hem se "MELBRIN Cavaw", hemi stat blong ol nem blong ol Ward Kansel blong Eria blong Centrol Pentecost we mifala istap mekem awareness long hem.

Thankyou long VWC.

Kathleen Mabon Bani: Vanuatu Women's Centre – Your Name!

Your name! Vanuatu Women Centre!

Your name in 1992 was new to Vanuatu

Your name was dishonoured by majority of people

Your name was a threat to those who dishonoured you

Your name perpetrators' hate but inwardly they fear you

Your name People wanted it change to Family Support Centre

Your name is unshakeable

Your name! Vanuatu Women Centre!

Like a star that brought light into the darkness

Like a path that women, children and men followed to find solutions

Like a shield that protects survivors of domestic violence

Like a shelter protecting survivors,

and mother who lobby for Women's Human Rights

Your name is unshakeable

Your name! Vanuatu Women Centre!

People, organizations and governments who believe in you look up to for;

Your service

Assistance

Consultation

Teaching

Training

Correction

Guidance

Your name and services impacted lives

! Vanuatu Women Centre!

Your name is recognised Nationally, Regionally & your name touched the Globe

Chapter 3:

Perspectives on VWC's achievements and challenges

Iaken Ampen: Lessons and achievements in male advocacy

Lessons

The first time I attended a workshop on violence against women and girls was in 2004. The workshop was conducted by VWC and an FWCC representative. I came to the workshop with very limited knowledge on issues around violence against women. That workshop was an eye-opener for me. It was conducted within a very well-structured session which really captured the learning outcome of understanding the issues around violence against women.

The lessons I learned at the workshop formed the basis for me considering that violence against women is a very serious issue that needs to be addressed. With that, I had to take a very serious reflection on my personal attitudes towards my wife and daughter, because they are the first women who experienced all these forms of violence in our home. It came to my mind, that if I wanted to be an effective advocate against violence against women, then it had to start within me. I put a lot of effort into working on my personal behaviours, with reminders coming from my wife. This really built a strong foundation of courage and self-confidence to become an effective male advocate on violence against women. The value of a harmonious relationship has to be established and experienced with my wife and daughter, and only then can other women out there enjoy the benefit from my advocacy activities.



Chief Inspector Iaken Ampen, Acting Director of Pollice College, Vanuatu Police Force

I had my own enthusiasm, and the Vanuatu Women Centre contributed a lot by providing more training on male advocacy. They involved me with training and awareness programs as much as they could, according to VWC's yearly scheduled activities. This broadened my capability of becoming who I am today in the work I do as male advocate. It enlightened me to better understand all the issues within society that affect women through the various trainings I have taken.

"I had to take a very serious reflection on my personal attitudes towards my wife and daughter ... If I wanted to be an effective advocate against violence against women, then it had to start with me."

Achievements and challenges

I advocated on different forms of violence against women, and worked in collaboration with the Police and VWC. In 2007, male Police officers were selected to attend a workshop in New Zealand for the first time. The workshop was on violence against woman and I was part of the team. After the workshop, I produced and submitted a report to the Police Commissioner at that time, and recommended for the Police to establish a special unit to deal with violence against women. The Family Protection Unit was set up in 2010, and we have created an environment where women who face violence can come and lodge their complaints.

There was a big need for Police Officers to be equipped with knowledge and skill to better respond to violence against women cases. To deal with this, I recommended that a training package on violence against women must be included with other training modules within the Vanuatu Police Training College, to train serving Police officers and new recruits, and this has been carried out till today.

"I recommended that a training package on violence against women must be included with other training modules within the Vanuatu Police Training College, to train serving Police officers and new recruits, and this has been carried out till today."

With Merilyn, we've made outreach to every island in Vanuatu to educate chiefs and pastors, as well as leaders inside communities, to better understand violence against women and also children. Working together with VWC, a five-day workshop on Gender, Violence against Women, and Human Rights was held with leaders in my church, with men, women and youth. A similar five-day workshop was held in Vila with North Tanna Chiefs living in Vila, and other workshops were held on Tanna with chiefs, and men and women in communities in my home area of North Tanna. A new CAVAW was set up after these workshops.

"With Merilyn, we've made outreach to every island in Vanuatu to educate chiefs and pastors, as well as leaders inside communities ...

Until today, I am still one of VWC's male advocates and I continue to commit to this work."

Until today, I am still one of VWC's male advocates and I continue to commit to this work. All the training has shaped me, including in decision making within my partner and children at home. One of my priorities was always to have good harmony and peace at home before doing any outreach or advocating about the topic in different islands. I continue to request VWC to speak during the training of police recruits. All these things show the achievements I have had due to my involvement with VWC as a male advocate.

Miriam Bule: Moments, achievements and challenges

Achievements

The most important moment in VWC's history, I would say was when the donor partners recognised VWC's efforts to eliminate violence against women, and started to fund her activities.

The greatest achievement over all these years is the acquisition by the Australian Government of the permanent building that houses the VWC head office in Vila in 2013.

Another achievement is the national survey on "Women's lives and family relationships". The data collected from this survey is proof to the ni-Vanuatu that violence against women and girls is alive and thriving healthily in the country.



Miriam Bule has held several positions at VWC over the years: Volunteer Librarian, Community Educator, Counsellor, and is currently Counsellor Supervisor

Why these are important

It is very important for readers to know about these moments in VWC history, because they can learn, understand more about violence against women, girls and children, and render their support towards VWC's cause. Getting a permanent building ended the era of finding office spaces and having to pay for rental fees. More importantly, it also means that women will always easily find us, unlike prior to 2013, when VWC was located in different office spaces, making it difficult and confusing to clients as to where to find us.

The data from the survey is proof that domestic violence is a gender issue from all aspects of society, whether traditionally, religiously or politically.

The biggest challenge

The biggest challenge that VWC has faced in the past was to gain recognition from the traditional and religious leaders in the country. It took them a very long time to accept VWC as an agent of change, and to realise that what VWC is advocating against is violence against women, girls and children, and that VWC can assist them to bring back harmony in disputing relationships.

VWC got through this challenge by taking on board the Male Advocacy Program, and training male advocates, including chiefs, church leaders, Vanuatu Police and Vanuatu Mobile Force members, and other male leaders to assist in educating the communities, especially men. Men will listen and believe in men, and that is a strategy that VWC uses to get through this challenge.

"We got through this challenge by taking on board the male advocacy program ..."

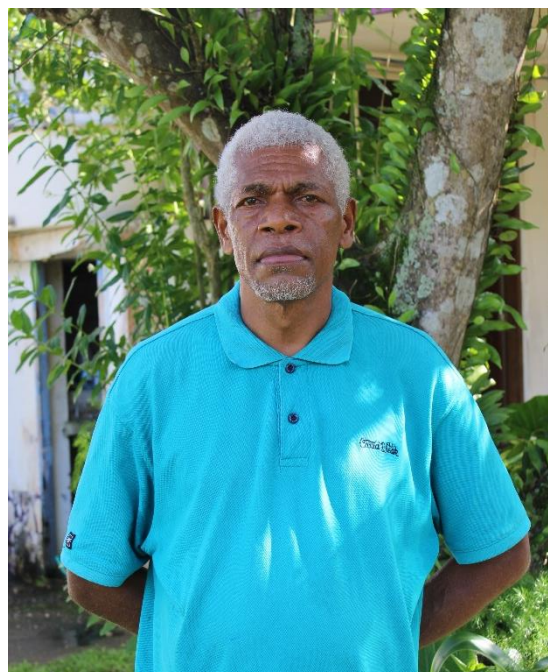
Hutchinson Bogiri: The biggest challenges

My name is Hutchinson Bogiri. I am a male advocate, working with the Penama Counselling Centre which is located at Lavatu in North Pentecost.

I am interested in answering Question 3 which reads: "What are the biggest challenges that VWC has faced - or that you have faced as a male advocate?"

As a male advocate, and from my point of view, here in North Pentecost, the biggest challenge that VWC is facing is the Custom, Culture and tradition of Penama Province.

In Penama Province Custom, and Culture and tradition are very strong. And religious beliefs have also been a major obstacle here making it hard for VWC to breakthrough to Penama Province. The governing system that has been put in place has created a way for VWC to train Men Leaders, such as Male Advocates to breakthrough right to community level.



Hutchinson Bogiri, High Chief from Pentecost, and trained male advocate working with Penama Counselling Centre

Since 2012 and with all the trainings received, our work has been easier, in relation to giving awareness and talks to domestic violence survivors, women and girls.

Elisha Sine: Women's rights

*You cannot rob us of the rights we Cherish,
Nor turn our thoughts away
From the bright picture of a "Woman's
Mission"
Our hearts portray
We claim to dwell quiet and Seclusion
Beneath the household roof,
From the great world's harsh strife,
and cheering voices
To stand aloof.*



Elisha Sine, PECC Office Assistant

Keasi Zepherino and Christine Keasi: Life changer

My mother Christine Keasi told me to write something about Vanuatu Women Centre and its impact in our lives. I love to share these impacts on her behalf because this is a form of gratitude to my precious mother and to her organisation, her employer, Mme Merilyn Tahi and her fellow colleagues.

I remember from my childhood, since 2002, my mother has been recruited as one of the VWC staff. I was 7 years old at that time. It has been 19 exciting and challenging years of work for my mother in VWC. Now in 2021, I am 27 years.

VWC for me is the only safe place children and women around the country and also a life changer.



Christine Keasi and her son, Zepherino; Christine worked with VWC for many years as Mobile Counsellor in Port Vila before transferring back to Tanna, where she now works as Counsellor with the Tafea Counselling Centre

The main impacts of VWC

Among other impacts that VWC has done in Vanuatu and in our lives, there are lots of great achievements and accomplishments. I can only say that I am proud and happy to be part of VWC as a son, among other children of its employees. However, what are the main impacts of Vanuatu Women's Centre in our lives and in our society?

We will look at three impacts. VWC has changed our communities through the presence of our mother as employee: the respect of women, the violence against women and children and the advocacy of human rights are now considered or known in our community. And it has contributed to our family especially in terms of education. Also, it plays a major role in educating us to respect women and children.

To begin with, the respect of women and children, the violence against women and children and the human rights are well advocated and considered in our communities through the influence and the advocacy of Vanuatu Women's Centre and my mother. The presence of my mother as an employee of VWC in the village has made a big change. The issues of violence and abuses reduced a lot. My mother always advocates about gender equality. Nowadays there are women engaging in

The main impacts

1. **Change to our communities** through the presence of our mother as an employee of VWC – respect for women and knowledge of violence against women and women's human rights has increased
2. **Contribution to our family** – particularly by investing in the education of our family
3. **Changes in our personal life** – educating us to respect women and children

leadership roles in the Presbyterian Church in Imaio village in Tanna Island and in some other villages too around the island. Women also manage to speak out in the nakamal in some meetings.

In addition, during the 19 years of working at VWC, my mother has invested a lot in our studies. My little brother is currently doing his year 12 science studies. And as for me, I would like to thank my mother and Vanuatu Women Centre for my achievement. I

arrived at my master degree studies in the field of Economic and Social Science. My mother through VWC showed me that human social living worth, if we live equally and respect each other in order to develop, in one way on the other, our nation and our country Vanuatu. So that is why I choose to pursue my education in social and economic studies. I have learned, through my mother, that not giving up on a dream, work or fight can make you achieve many things in life. The better world awaits us all, both genders, if we keep on going no matter challenges of life especially in advocating for the human rights, gender equality and peace.

Lastly, my mother and Vanuatu Women's Centre has put a footprint in our lives especially for me. My mother herself is a victim of violence in our home and I do not want to deny that. This has always melted my heart but she never gives up on us with her love and her fight. We were, throughout 19 years, educated that respecting a woman and children, human rights, gender equality, sharing of works, caring about our wives, no to violence, are the most important principles to apply in our lives. I remember the common words my mother uses repeatedly; "Me no house girl blong you mo wan woman hemi no slave mo boxing bag blong you". This is true and sad sometimes. Some people are actually treating women as slaves and applying violence in their homes. My mother has really insisted that this will not be a case for us, her sons. I know this is very difficult for us because we will not avoid conflict and challenges in the couple's life but I also know that it only takes a real man and human being to control oneself and take good care of a woman. As for me, I respect and care for my woman and my children as I ever respected and care for my mother. I am grateful that organisation has been present into our life to teach us how to be good citizen and man in the country, province, island, village and home. We will be proud to continue and transmit in our future generations the fight of our mother alongside Vanuatu Women's Centre.

"Nowadays, there are women engaging in leadership roles in the Presbyterian Church in Imaio village in Tanna and in some other villages too around the island. Women also manage to speak out in the nakamal in some meetings."

"I know ... we will not avoid conflict and challenges in the couple's life but I also know that it only takes a real man and human being to control oneself and take good care of a woman."

In short, Vanuatu Women's Centre has made excitingly a lot of impact in our lives and in the society. The seed that they had planted since the establishment has bore the fruits. We thank that organisation for the changes brought in our village in terms of gender equality, end of violence and the advocacy of human rights in our family. Vanuatu Women's Centre has contributed to our education. We will keep and continue to advocate the principles and values in our homes and in the society. I use to tell my girlfriend that God has made a woman so special and precious so man need to man-up for them with equality, respect, love, commitment, forgiveness, trust, passion, communication, kindness, compromising and understanding. It only takes great personality and values in a man to make a real change.

Lynn Rose Tule: Life blong mi long Vanuatu Women's Centre

Firstly, I would like to take this time to thank Mrs Merilyn Tahi, for the recognition, for employing me in this organization as a VWC staff. She educated me, empowered me and mentored me. Through knowledge and skills, it built me up to where I am today.

Since 1992, we Vanuatu Women Centre I statem wok blong hem, hemi bin stanap blong advocate from Human Raets blong ol woman. Tru long ol aweanes we oli bin stap go aot long komunity, selebretem ol spesel events. Olsem wan organization hemi providem wan sef counselling spes blong ol woman blong oli save gat wan ples blong go tok abaot harem nogud blong olgeta. Mo wok ia I bin sevem laef blong fulap woman kasem tete.

Wan bigfala achivements nao hemi save gat wan own property, mo spredem wok blong hem tru aot long evri Province long Vanuatu.

Hemi important blong wan reader I intrest blong read abaot history blong book blong yumi, from olsem wan organization hemi bin changem laef blong fulap Ni Vanuatu Citizens, hemi wan long ol first organization we I bin stap blong adressem ol issues on, GBV, DV, and HR. Mo hemi the only organization we hemi providem free counselling blong ol woman ol gel mo ol pikinini.

As a former CAVAW member, mo wan staff blong Vanuatu Women Centre, mi lukim organization ia hemi shapem laef blong mi, as where I am today, through Educating me, up skilling mi, hemi bin moldem gud laef blong mi. Hemi bin helpem mi wetem family blong mi.

Hemi bin impotant tumas long mi from organization ia I sustainem laef blong mi wetem family blong mi, changem laef blong mi, mekem mi strong blong stanap advocate for womans Human Raets. And hemi helpem mi blong mi save stanap blong helpem ol nara woman.

Wan biggest challenge we VWC I facem, hemi Former Kodineta or Founder blong centre ia I bin stop wok from medical risen.

Mi bin go tru challenge ia from mi bin wok long taem wetem forma kodineta, mo mi bin save wanem nao wok blong VWC.

Bai hemi important blong wan reader I intrest blong readim from bai hemi luk hao nao centre ia I helpem wan staff or wan CAVAW member blong stanap strong from ol nara woman.



Lynn Rose Tule began as a CAVAW member, then joined VWC staff as a Counsellor, and later CAVAW Officer, then Counsellor Manager, and is now VWC's Community Educator

VWC – “hemi bin changem laef blong fulap Ni-Vanuatu citizens...”

Before mi kam wan CAVAW memba and as a VWC staff today, mi bin kam long centre olsem wan klaent. Mo centre I bin helpem mi blong mi applae I go long island kot from child maintenance, so mi talem bigfala thank yu long Vanuatu Women Centre, from I bin helpem mi blong ol papa blong ol pikinini blong mi oli save pem child maintenance. Mo money ia I bin helpem mi blong save stap pem skul fees blong ol pikinini blong mi.

So tru long kes blong mi we centre I save helpem mi, mi bin luk save se ol nara woman long komuniti blong mi tu I stap fesem semak situation, I mekem se mi bin askem VWC blong kam ranem 5 days awaeanness wokshop long village blong mi, mo setemap wan niu CAVAW Komiti, we mi tu mi bin nominated olsem wan CAVAW memba, bak in 2004.

So taem mi wok olsem CAVAW memba, mi wetem ol nara komiti I bin mekem fullap wok long ples blong mi. Mifala I bin stap mekem awaeanness long ol villages blong ol komunity save abaot ol wok we VWC stap mekem, mo CAVAW I bin stap recivem fullap klaent. So follem bigfala data blong ol klaents we Gaua CAVAW I bin stap luk, I mekem se long wan conference blong VWC long 2005 Ol CAVAW blong Torba meet tugeta long group discussion blong mifala mo lukluk long ol data blong evri CAVAW blong Torba then mifala kamap long tingting blong askem VWC blong save gat wan Centre long Torba, olsem branch blong VWC.

Long 2006 DWA I bin askem mi olsem wan CAVAW memba blong attendem wan conference blong ol woman long Malapoa collage. So afta long meeting ia, DWA Director Mrs Hilda Taleo Nominatem mi olsem wan participant blong attendem skul long Fiji we hemi Komunity Education and Training Centre (CETC).

So long 2008 mi bin go skul long FIJI long saed blong Komunity Education and Training Centre. Then afta long 7 months training blong mi long CETC, mi bin kam bak mo applae kam long VWC from wan position blong wan counsellor. So VWC I bin acceptem application blong mi so mi statem wok wetem VWC in 2009.

Follem request blong setemap ofis long Sola olsem wan branch blong VWC, I mekem se long JANUARY 2011, mi bin travel I go long Sola long Vanualava Bankis blong setemap Ofis, and today yumi gat Torba Counselling Centre. Hemi no bin wan isi taem blong mifala blong finem wan ofis spes. Mi bin tekem tufala foma CAVAW Membas Miss Grace Ralph we hemi wan Kavaw memba long island blong Motalava, mo tete hemi wok Project Ofisa blong TOCC, and Mrs Anjoy Stanly we hemi wan Kavaw komiti blong West Vanualava. From hemi bin hard blong finem ofis spes, I mekem se MRS Dorin Eldads bin givem wan

Lynn Rose's journey:

- From being a client needing assistance with child maintenance ...

- To helping to set up a new CAVAW and becoming a CAVAW member in 2004 ...

- To asking VWC to set up a branch in Torba province ...

- To becoming a staff member of VWC in 2009 ...

- To the establishment of the Torba Counselling Centre in 2011



spes long mifala blong usum olsem wan ofis long Guest Haos blong hem. So mifala first setemap Torba Counselling Centre emi long Bangalow blong Mrs Dorin Eldads.

Afta 1 month we mifala set up long Bangalow blong Mrs Dorin Eldads, then mifala bin finem wan nara spes long haos blong Male Advocate, Kaleb Wilkins. So mifala bin setup long we for 1 months. Then mifala needim wan mo staff, and mifala tekem Folin Joy olsem CAVAW blong Mota blong kam wok wetem mifala.

Fr. John Sovan I bin ova blong givem haos blong hem blong mifala usum olsem ofis spes, kasem June 2012 TOCC I movem ofis I go long nara ples. First aweanes blong TOCC nao mifala bin celebratem 8 Maj 2011 mo pared I bin go through long bigfala rod long Sola. Mo mifala bin mekem aweanes long taem ia.

2013 VWC I setemap CAVAW section, so oli putum mi wok olsem CAVAW ofisa. Mi bin stap follem Mrs Marilyn Tah, fullap taem blong stap luk hao hemi stap ranem ol 5 days workshop, then mi follem hem blong luk hao hemi ranem ol Provincial CAVAW trainings, and mi bin stap follem hem blong luk hao hemi stap mekem ol komuniti awareness. So thats where I learn a lot from her and today I can ran a 5 days Provincial CAVAW Trainings, 5 days awareness workshops, and Hao blong mekem Public speaking.

2015 mi bin travel to Malakula blong helpem Shina Thimoty blong mitufala I setemap Malampa Counselling Centre. Mitufala bin go meeting wetem ol bigfala man long Provincial Government blong mekem oli awesa se bai MCC bai setup long Malekula and bai yumi wantem wok tugeta wetem provincial Government. Hemi no bin isi long mitufala. Mitufala I bin go toktok wetem Keneth Killman, mo askem if hemi gat sam renting haos, then hemi givem haos blong hem blong usum olsem first ofis spes. So mifala toktok I kam then Lisa Laban I bin kam blong mifala setemap ofis. Mo first activity blong MCC nao mifala I bin organisem wan Parade long Jifs day long Wala Rano village, mo mifala bin mekem awareness long taem ia.

“... min bin gat that PASSION blong work ia mo mi feelim mi wan se mi save mekm eni wok long ol nara section long long VWC from mi bin Multiskills long sam areas of wok ...”

2016 taem Fridah Butu olsem Counsellor Supervisor, I bin risaen, mi mekem wok olsem counsellor supervisor mo sem taem wok olsem CAVAW ofisa. For 2 years mi bin managem tufala sections until mi bin resaen long 2018, mi bin travel aot for 2-year mo taem mi kam bak, VWC askem mi blong mi reapplae blong kam bak wok long VWC, from

“First aweanes blong TOCC nao mifala bin celebrate 8 Maj 2011 mo pared I bin go through long bigfala rod long Sola.”

- Trained to be CAVAW Officer when the VWC CAVAW section was set up in 2013 ...
- Helped Shina Timothy and VWC to set up the Malampa Counselling Centre in 2015 ...
- Resigned from the role of Counsellor Manager in 2018 ...
- Then back at VWC as Community Educator in 2021



Participants in VWC's 5-day community awareness workshop on Epi Island march against violence against women, May 2016; Lynn Rose (right) hands out Bislama posters on the Family Protection Act

mi bin gat that PASSION blong wok ia mo mi feelim mi wan se mi save mekm eni wok long ol nara section long VWC from mi bin Multiskills long sam areas of wok and mi bin wantem blong kam bak wok.

So, 11 January 2021 mi bin kam bak wok lo VWC, and tete mi wok olsem Community Educator. And mi bin really wantem blong kam bak wok long VWC. Hemi from mi gat PASSION blong mekem wok ia, mo mi lovem wok wetem ol woman.



Lynn Rose stands in front of the VWC community education section prepared for VWC's Open Day in 2021

"Mi no bin ting se bai wan day mi wok long VWC olsem wan senior staff. But VWC I buildemap mi, shape my laef, sustaine my laef, educate mi to where I am today, empower mi to be a very strong advocator for women's human rights."

Mi no bin ting se bai wan day mi wok long VWC olsem wan staff and go as far as senior staff. VWC I buildemap mi, shapem laef blong mi, educatem mi kasem we mi stap tete. Wok ia tu i bin empowerem mi blong mi save stanap strong olsem wan advocator blong addressem ol issues blong vaelens agensem ol woman mo human raets blong ol woman. True VWC Work mi bin achivem wanem we mi bin needim.

Mi no bin ting se bai mi kam wan CAVAW Ofisa, Wan Counsellor Supervisor, and a Community Educator, the joyney has takem mi to where I am today.

MI WANTED TALEM BIGFALA THANK YU LONG VANUATU WOMEN CENTRE LONG BIGFALA HELP MO SUPPORT AND THE RECOGNITION WE CENTRE I SAVE LUK SAVE MI OLSEM WAN SURVIVOR MO BUILD MAP MI KASEM WEA MI STAP TETE.

BAI MI STANAP STRONG OLTAEM FROM OL WOMAN KASEM OL LAST DEIS BLONG WOK BLONG MI LONG VANUATU WOMEN CENTRE.

"Bai mi stanap strong oltaem from ol woman ..."

Davis Saravanu: I salute you all

My name is Davis Saravanu of Malekula, Malampa Province, Vanuatu. I am happy to take part in the Vanuatu Women's Centre story to give my experience of how I became who I am.

To live in a harmonious family relationship or in a society without violent behavior is not that easy in fact, there will always be challenges unless we understand very well the sharing of roles and responsibilities in terms of gender roles. Most people find it very difficult to avoid violence when it comes to self-control but we must always have the attitude of respect for each other with love and dignity and forget all about power and control then we can control our behavior. Inferior and hierarchy is also one of the most common issues in societies and even in most institutions of our work place. Whether we realise it or not, it is also a form of violence occurred which creates ill feelings amongst each other but we were silent about.



*Provincial Commander Davis Saravanu,
Malampa, Vanuatu Police Force*

We must also take into consideration that customs, culture, tradition and politics also become barriers in our societies which affect our gender roles in terms of our beliefs and norms and really impact children as they grow up, they always thought it is normal to live violently. If we are living in a society where there are violent behavior practices, we cannot escape because we usually think it is a norm unless we must have that sound knowledge of a changing of attitude and behavior in our mind set.

"We must also take into consideration that customs, culture, tradition and politics also become barriers in our societies which affect our gender roles in terms of our beliefs and norms and really impact children as they grow up. ..."

"To me, it is very challenging as I sit and recall back to my childhood, still this mentality of hierarchy, self-esteem, power and controls and norms over rules my life."

To me it is very challenging as I sit and recall back to my childhood, still this mentality of hierarchy, self-esteem, power and control and norms over rules my life. This violent behavior continued until joining the Vanuatu Police force in 1993, I started to see things differently as the Vanuatu Police force is a disciplinary organisation. It does not tolerate such practices as all forms of violence are a crime so from there it reminds me that changing of attitude and mindset must prevail so it motivates me a lot to make the change.

It was in 2005 when I first attended the male advocate training provided by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre in Fiji; VWC took four of us ni-Vanuatu men to the first male advocacy training that FWCC

held (Iaken Ampen, John Joe, Saen Fanai and me). We stayed through the 5 weeks training and graduated as male advocates.

I continued in my police work with increased working together with VWC. I was promoted to lead the team working at the Family Protection Unit when it was set up in 2010. I held that post for some time. I was still available to help with VWC activities, meetings and programs nationally, regionally and internationally.

In 2022 I was promoted to be Commander for Malampa Police and relocated to Lakatoro. I have already met and learnt about the work of Malampa Counselling Centre.

"It was in 2005 when I first attended the male advocate training provided by the Fiji women's crisis Centre in Fiji; VWC took four of us ni-Vanuatu men to the first male advocacy training that FWCC held ... We stayed through the 5 weeks training and graduated as male advocates. ..."

Through the Vanuatu Women's Centre, I followed up with several other serious trainings ..."

Through Vanuatu Women Centre, I followed up with several other serious trainings, I started getting to learn more about violence, what are the causes, what is a gender, a gender role, violence against women, changing of behaviour and attitude, what is domestic violence and changing of mind sets. Once going through this series of training, it continues to remind me that really violence is a crime and is not tolerated in our societies and in our work place.

I also get to understand that there is no one under the sun that is created differently to refer to God the creator in terms of biblical truth. All are created the same regardless of our status. We all are created in the image of God, created male and female and we are one therefore we are to treat each other equally with love and dignity in all aspects of life.

Finally, as a leader in the community and a Provincial Commander, I am proud to be a male advocate to advocate for women's human rights to access these equal rights as men in all societies, politically, church, cultural societies, and in any institutions. Further to that, I am willing to work and defend the rights for women, children and women with disabilities.

Without being in the women's network, I wouldn't have come this far as one of the Provincial Commanders and a senior Police officer. Therefore, I urge all men and boys to work together and treat all women, girls, children and people with special needs (disabilities) equally and to eliminate all forms of violence in all institutions and societies and be more mindful that domestic violence and other forms of violence is a **'crime'**.

As such, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Vanuatu woman Centre, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, the Vanuatu Police Force and not forgetting other donor partners for their support to bring me up to this level.

I salute you all.

"Without being in the women's network, I wouldn't have come this far as one of the Provincial Commanders and a senior Police officer. Therefore, I urge all men and boys to work together and treat all women, girls, children and people with special needs (disabilities) equally and to eliminate all forms of violence in all institutions and societies."

Lily Binihi: VWC will always stand firm



I started working at Vanuatu Women's Centre back in 2013. I learnt about domestic violence here, where it was mostly spoken about in the radio and on newspapers. Domestic violence affects a lot of women and children especially girls in Vanuatu and around the world.

Domestic violence, even though spoken about can never be stopped. Counsellors at VWC are well trained in greeting clients and assisting them with whatever they need even when it means assisting them to the police, courts or health centres.

Vanuatu Women's Centre will always stand firm and strong on eliminating violence against women and children and empowering them for a better future.

Lily Binihi is VWC's Cleaner in Port Vila; she participates in campaigns, special events and VWC's staff training retreats

Annetty Mulenga: You are always there for me

*You are always there for me
I popped in and out of school
You are always there for me
I moved from one place to another
You are always there for me
I travel from one island to another
You are always there for me
I travel from province to province
You are always there for me
I travel round Vanuatu
You are always there for me
I tried to ignore you... But Then,
You ring the Bell in my head... That,
You are always there for me
Now you provide me with what I need, ...
Counselling Skills, Financial Needs, and Shelter
Vanuatu.... Woman's.... Centre
MY SURVIVOR.....*



Annetty Mulenga is a Counsellor with the Torba Counselling Centre

Willie Daniel Obed: The mentality that gives privileges to men

There are many of us who have been trained by Vanuatu Women's Centre to become male advocates throughout Vanuatu. We were brought up by our traditional customs and religious background in different islands of Vanuatu. In our traditional custom, women are not allowed to speak in our community, they have no right to speak.

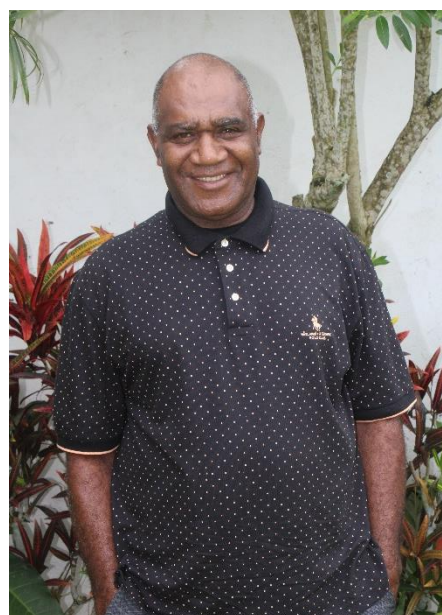
VWC had the initiative to train men on how to change their norms, behaviours and attitudes towards women. We came from different institutions: Chiefs, churches, people who worked in justice in the islands, and many Police Officers. The training is to change men's mentality about issues that affect women in our society. In my islands in the Shepherds Group, men belong to the *nakamal* of Chiefs but women belong to the household. That's the mentality I am talking about, that's the traditional custom that existed before, and until today. That mentality gives privileges to men.

Men have power in the *nakamal*. They have the right to speak, and to become Chiefs. It is still hard for women to speak in front of men in the *nakamal*. But I am proud to say that VWC, under the leadership of the former Coordinator Mrs Marilyn Tahi, had the vision to train us men to go back to rural areas and communities throughout Vanuatu.

It is true, we have been facing many barriers and challenges. The attitudes and norms that we men look down on women has to stop, because of the power and the control we have over women. Today we see men have been trained to go out to the communities to advocate for women's rights. I'm glad to see men have more understanding of gender equality. The message we get during our training is that God created us the same. Many Chiefs believe that women have no rights, so the whole country has a lot of issues on attitudes, norms and behaviours against women. VWC has been working hard with male advocates to stop violence against women.

There are many islands that need to set up the Network of VWC in the future. For example in Shefa province in South Epi, we have many people with damaging norms and attitudes on gender inequality. Also, more training is needed for male advocates. The more we educate men, the more our country will realise women's rights.

I am happy that I am a Police Officer working together with the VWC. Our goal is to provide services to safeguard people in our communities. I maintain my status as a male advocate. Our priority is how to change people's mentality, so that the future generations may behave and live happily. We are living in this world for a short time. God wants us to manage our lives in love, peace and joy. When you change the mentality, your community has a good living and development will grow in the community.



Seargent Willie Daniel Obed, Vanuatu Police Force, has been an active male advocate of Tongoa CAVAW for many years.

"In our traditional custom, women are not allowed to speak in our community, they have no right to speak. ...

I am proud to say that VWC, under the leadership of the former Coordinator Mrs Marilyn Tahi, had the vision to train us men to go back to rural areas and communities throughout Vanuatu. ...

It is true, we have been facing many barriers and challenges. The attitudes and norms that we men look down on women has to stop, because of the power and control we have over women"

Someone may be raised to be a good person, but these damaging behaviours and norms affect people's lives emotionally, physically, sexually, and financially.

I am proud because VWC trained me to become a male advocate, and this gave me the opportunity to be awarded a short-term scholarship, and to work for women in many ways. I was chosen by VWC to contribute to a male advocates' meeting in Fiji. I

worked with UN Women to begin a program on CEDAW in Shefa province. Today you hear and see market vendors around Efate benefitting from that. This was my first achievement as a male advocate.


"I am happy that I am a Police officer working together with the VWC. Our goal is to provide services to safeguard people in our communities. I maintain my status as a male advocate."

Later I was chosen by UN Women to contribute to a market exchange program held in the Solomon Islands, where I was asked to stay on with Chiefs, to help them recognise the importance of women's jobs. I was also awarded a short-term scholarship by the New Zealand High Commission. I was in NZ for a month, attached to the Family Violence Unit where I learned how the services of different organisations come together to deal with violence against women. There's a good method of victim support. I'm proud to say that I was trained as a male advocate Police Officer by VWC, and I have been a Police Officer all along.



All the male advocates who have made contributions to this book – and many more throughout Vanuatu, including Police officers, Chiefs, Church leaders, staff in National and Provincial Government in many departments and ministries, Provincial Area Councillors and male community members – have worked with and supported CAVAWs, assisted many clients to access justice, ensured clients are safe, made referrals to VWC, Branches and CAVAWs, and helped to organise activities to spread the VWC message throughout the country. Some have also made presentations to communities and workshops during VWC's outreach work. VWC acknowledges your efforts, and thanks you all for continuing to work for women's and children's rights, and for being accountable to the Vanuatu women's movement.

Kathleen Mabon Bani: Vanuatu Women's Centre

<p>National issues Family issues Women issues Girls and boys issues You do not tolerate violence</p> <p>An eagle that flies high all over Vanuatu Your Committee on Violence Against Women in all the 6 Provinces of Vanuatu Your branches in all the 6 provinces of Vanuatu You fly high to snatch out violence from women and children Why an eagle? Because when you fly high like an eagle, you can almost see everything You do not tolerate violence</p> <p>A search light for survivors You stand tall You speak on behalf of survivors You shine a path Your light brings hope to the lost You do not tolerate violence</p>	 <p><i>Kathleen Mabon Bani, Sanma Counselling Centre Project Officer</i></p>
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Sanma Counselling Centre (SCC) staff arrived at Luganville market at 5.30am for the 16 Days of Activism campaign in 2018. They began with a half-hour talk that was completed before the women had to start selling their crops. They stayed for the morning. Many women came to the booth for information.

Miriam Bule: Team Efforts



Just a few of the people who together have been part of VWC's team efforts: VWC staff based in Port Vila, trustees, donor representatives, VWC's consultant and other supporters at VWC's 24th anniversary in September 2016

To all former staff:

All our team efforts have resulted in what VWC is today.

We laughed together,

We cried together,

We shared together,

Information, knowledge, wisdom, even food

We comforted each other,

We assisted each other,

We empathized to understand each other's difficulties,

We respected each other's personal spaces,

We were a family of women with passion for the work.

Some are no longer with us, physically

May their souls rest in peace.

Some have moved on in life,

May you enjoy life as it is

Knowing that you have grown stronger

While we were together.

To the current staff:

Team efforts we will continue with,

Picking up from where our colleagues have left,

To strengthen VWC as a Non-Governmental Organization,

Striving to eliminate violence against women, girls and children

And bringing back harmonies and peace to our communities,

Together.

To the hardworking team of experts (Dr. Juliet Hunt, Danielle Roubin and former coordinator, Ms. Marilyn Tahi):

Your tireless efforts to train,

Coach,

Assess,

Listen,

Correct,

Understand us.

Your patience in bearing with us

To understand the different aspects of this work.

Your continuous willingness to disseminate your knowledge

In its simplest language and local metaphors, so we can understand.

Your ways of minimizing and normalizing issues that seem so serious to us,

Your smiles and words that comfort us

When we think we have wronged you?

Or made an unforgivable mistake?

All these and many more of your treasured characters

We will always cherish in our hearts.

To our donors

Your understanding of the issue,

Your willingness to donate funds,

To enable VWC to implement its planned activities,

Has built the spirit of willingness

And determination,

For her to network with her partners and stakeholders

To achieve a common goal:

“Ending violence against women, girls and children in Vanuatu”.

All our team work has shaped and molded what VWC is today.

Together

Our future focus:

“To make Vanuatu a safer place to live in”.

Chapter 4:

Personal journeys towards equality and human rights for women and children

Shina Timothy: How Vanuatu Women's Centre changed my life

Long year 2004 mi bin stap wetem ol pikinini blong mi long aos, mo ol Komiti Against Vaelens Against Woman (KAVAW) members long Uripiv island kam luk me. Blong sapos mi save go joinem olgeta blong mekem ol awareness, around long ol areas we oli bin plan blong go mekem awareness lem. Mo mi bin part blong mekem ol awareness ia.

Kasem we Coordinator blong Vanuatu Women Centre (VWC) bin jusum mi blong go attendem first ever training. We mi bin lanem fulap samting long life blong me. We mi stap fesem be mi never save se oli ol rabis fasin. We i stap rili daonem life blong mi wetem tufala pikinini blong me.

Year after year mi stap go long training, mo mi faenem aot se life long home too istap change. From ol information we mi stap tekem aot long ol trainings blong me, ibuildem up me blong changem home. Mo too small small mani we Vanuatu Women Centre (VWC) istap givim long me i helpem bigwan famli mo home blong me. Mo too ihelpem mi blong save buildem up wan aos. Mo too startem wan small canteen blong me long home, blong helpem ol pikinini blong mi, taem me stap travel blong mekem awareness mo too blong kam long ol training blong me.



Shina Timothy began her involvement with VWC as a CAVAW member, was an interviewer for VWC's prevalence research, and is now Project Officer for the Malampa Counselling Centre

"Year after year mi stap go long training, mo mi faenem aot se life long home too istap change."

Vanuatu Women Centre (VWC) emi wan organisation we i helpem mi bigwan long ol issues we fastaem long life, mi stap go through long hem. Mo emi liftimap save blong me long fulap ways: olsem save about laws; how blong deal wetem ol issues blong me one; mo too helpem me blong mi save fulap samting blong managem home blong me.

Naoia mi work olsem wan Project Officer. Me proud blong talem se VWC nao emi promotem me long ol skills, knowledge mo education blong me. Blong mi kam who me today. So mi SALUTUM Vanuatu Women Centre (VWC) long wanem we emi mekem long me.

Ruth Iavilu Naliu: You made me feminist

In my relationship I experienced domestic violence. I thought that was OK, because what I experienced was normal to every woman, and even girls. Nobody would bother about that. This was how society believed and expected women and girls to be treated. Only men had privileges, never women and girls. Society believed that women should not be allowed to talk in public, including in custom meetings where they were not allowed to share their views.

In 2006 I chose to be a member of a CAVAW, and attended my first CAVAW training in Port Vila by VWC. After that, more and more trainings and workshops shaped my life, and my family. The learning made me a feminist. I want to address violence against women and children, domestic violence and gender inequalities, and I want to work for gender equality.

In 2017 I was employed first at the Tafea Counselling Centre as a volunteer counsellor, and then in 2018 as a Counsellor. In 2020 I became Acting Project Officer, and in 2021 I became the Project Officer.

I want to acknowledge that VWC has educated me, and enabled me to support women, and educate them about their human rights. VWC helped me to recognise what domestic violence is, and that gender inequality is the root of violence against women and children.



Ruth Iavilu Naliu began her involvement with VWC as a CAVAW member, then became a volunteer with Tafea Counselling Centre (TCC); later, she became a TCC Counsellor and is now the TCC Project Officer

*“Only men had privileges, never women and girls.” ...
More and more trainings and workshops shaped my life, and my family.”*



Tafea Counselling Centre (TCC) was invited to give a public talk at Namilo marketplace in Southwest Tanna on National Women's Day in May 2020. The talk was attended by about 180 women, men and children. The team of TCC staff, a male advocate, and Tanna police each gave a talk. Many questions were asked after the session. The Chief Representative stated that his people have heard about TCC but have never heard about the services they are providing. He said the talk was an eye opener to the community living around Namilo area, and said that TCC will have to go back for more awareness on domestic violence.

Juliet Buleko: VWC hemi mekem mi strong

Mi nem blong mi Juliet Buleko. Mi kat 42 years old. Mi blong Pentecost north of Vanuatu.

VWC hemi gud tumas long mi. VWC hemi mekem mi save raets blong mi. Mi helpem ol woman, ol gel mo ol pikinini boy we oli unda long 18 years ikam taon. And blong oli save

“VWC hemi mekem mi save raets blong mi.”

raets blong olgeta. Mi save ol issues blong domestic vaelens mo helpem ol woman blong luk save.

Hao nao mi save VWC? Mi save VWC tru long Marilyn Tah. Mi bin stap nomo, so Marilyn hemi kam talem long mi se mi ko wok olsem pataem job long 2009.

Long 2009 mi nebour blong Marilyn Tah, mi mitim Marilyn Tah mo hemi askem mi blong mi ko cleaner blong office. Since then mi cleaner long wan year. Long 2010, mi ko deliver pikinini blong mi. Long 2011, mi sabmittim wan application blong office assistance blong 2 years. Long 2013 mi kam wan counsellor kasem naoia 2021.

Mi glad from mi helpem fulap mama we oli stap long vaelens. Mo ihelpem mi tu we mi save hap blong solvem problem blong mi wan. VWC hemi empowered mi mo hemi mekem mi strong blong helpem ol mama we oli stap long needs.



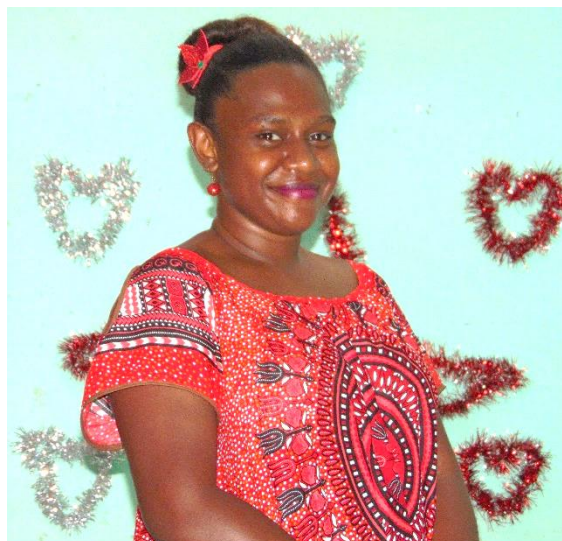
Juliet Buleko started her work with VWC as the Cleaner, before applying for the position of Office Assistant. She has been a Counsellor with VWC since 2013

Aicha Tevigogon: My story

VWC hemi helpem mi blong save cop wetem any situation we mi fesem long laef blong mi mo mekem mi luksave ol fasin blong vaelens we i stap happen insaet long laef mo home blong mi.

Mi mi kam olsem wan client blong VWC, ol staff oli bin encouragem mi wetem plante toktok blong mi strong mo no give up.

Vanuatu Women Centre, mi appreciatem yu bigwan.



Aicha Tevigogon is Office Assistant with Sanma Counselling Centre

Junany Marau: Yu empowerem ol woman mo ol pikinini

VANUATU WOMEN'S CENTRE. Yu bin bon long Vanuatu long 1992. Yu bin provaedem plante services we i helpem people blong Vanuatu, especially ol woman mo pikinini long ol nogud fasin blong domestic vaelens we oli stap fesem long ol home blong olgeta.

- Yu provaedem gud kaonseling
- Yu protektem ol families
- Yu maintenem ol broken home
- Yu assistim ol woman wetem child maintenance
- Yu empowerem ol woman mo pikinini long ol raets blong olgeta
- Yu mekem blong ol woman mo pikinini ikat justice long laef blong olgeta.



Junany Marau is the Volunteer with the Torba Counselling Centre

Mi happy tumas blong wok wetem Vanuatu Women's Centre from hemi jenisim laef mo home blong mi. Mi wan victim mo survivor blong domestic violence be mi save se mi special.

Thank you tumas Vanuatu Women's Centre long ol services blong yu we mi mo family blong mi i save benefit long hem. Bakeken, tank yu, tank yu, tank yu Vanuatu Women's Centre.

Fabian Sale: VWC hemi mean everything to me

Mi Name blong mi Fabian Sale. Mi gat 39 yrs old. Mi bin save work blong VWC long 2004 tru long wan wokshop we SCC ibin kam ranem long Kaiowo village long North Maewo, Penama Province North of Vanuatu.

VWC hemi mean everything to me. From taem mi kam joenem VWC, mi save aboutem right blong mi. And i helpem ol woman mo gel tu blong save aboutem right blong olgeta. And tu luk save ol issue blong domestic vaelens.

Since then mi kam olsem komiti blong kavaw blong Kaiovo start long 2005 kam kasem 2016. Hemia i mekem 12 year we mi stap olsem komiti blong kavaw.



Like many VWC and branch staff, Fabian Sale started as a CAVAW member, and worked hard to stop violence against women for 12 years in Gaiovo CAVAW. She joined Penama Counselling Centre as Counsellor in 2017

2017 Marilyn Tahi i askem mi blong kam wok long Penama Counselljng Centre olsem wan Counsellor. Centre hemi open long 16/01/2017. Mi enjoy wok, mo mi glad blong lukim ol mama mo gel we oli stap kam insaed long Centre for counselling. Mi feel fortunate blong holem wan wok olsem Counsellor, from i helpem mi wetem family blong mi.

Miriam Bule: From comfort zone to public arena

Born into a family of eight
I was the quietest one.
Twenty-four years later
I started another chapter in life,
Marriage.

Still remaining quiet, respectful of my husband
My domestic chores, and my duties as a mother.
Attending to customary expectations
And a very faithful church-goer.
Happily living in my comfort zone.

19 years into my marriage,
I joined the Vanuatu Women's Centre
As a volunteer librarian,
Building the Centre's information pool.
Became community educator a year later.
Taking the message about violence against women into the communities???
Feeling uncomfortable and not totally confident,
I prepared myself,
Ready to explore the world outside my comfort zone.

Skills I had to learn
To facilitate and train,
To be punctual,
To be assertive and outspoken,
To be confident and comfortable,
To be factual about the issues,
To be knowledgeable about culture and traditions,
About religion,
About politics,
I had to explore, research and reeducate myself on these issues.
I learnt to talk, act and think with care.
Honesty, truthfulness, humility, respect, confidentiality,
These are values I needed,
To complete a task
Without stirring a negative feedback.

*Counselling came some several years later.
 Learning to counsel women facing domestic violence
 Realizing only then that being a community educator alone
 Literally, is not so “whole” without being a counsellor.
 Counselling comes with a lot of real-life stories.
 Empathizing with clients gives one the real meaning,
 And the different emotions, effects and endings,
 Of what domestic violence does to victims/survivors.
 I need to put a smile on the victim/survivor’s face,
 To give her inner peace
 To enable harmony and peace in her relationship
 Is my main objective.*

*VWC, I am who I am today,
 Because you took me out of my comfort zone,
 Out of my humble ignorance,
 And molded me to understand
 How life can be so difficult, cruel and violent to women, girls, boys and children.
 You threw me into this sphere of healthy development,
 From which I have grown
 To be an educator, advocator, facilitator, trainer, paralegal, and counsellor.
 NO LONGER THE QUIETEST ONE!*



Miriam Bule, VWC Counsellor Supervisor, has worked closely with many other VWC and branch staff, including the two shown here: left, with MCC Project Officer Shina Timothy whom she mentored and trained to facilitate a 5-day community awareness workshop in the remote Elnisi NWA region of Malekula, which led to the establishment of new CAVAW in the region; and right with Rolengas Lolo, PECC Project Officer

Eva Rowsy: VWC taught me to be myself

Vanuatu Women's Centre
Right based organisation established in 1992
Advocating for Women's Rights
Children's Rights
Person with special needs
LBTQIQ ...
*A **SANCTUARY** for all women with diverse ethnicity*
Confidential counselling provided
Non-judgemental
Empowers women
*Fortifies them to yearn better, which they **DESERVE***
AS WOMEN ARE BORN EQUAL

My career with Vanuatu Women's Centre commenced in 2014 as a volunteer at Sanma Counselling Centre. I had no idea of the existence of such organisation back then. As a survivor of and violence against women and girls one way or another, Vanuatu Women Centre has taught me to be myself and appreciate my value. When Vanuatu Women's Centre established its fourth branch in Malekula in 2015, Malampa Counselling Centre, I applied for the position of Office Assistant and was recruited in July 2015. I started doing counselling as a counsellor. I worked with women and young girls and boys as Counsellor until 2021, when I got promoted to Community Educator. I have been serving for 7 years and I love my job.

Eva Rowsy started as a volunteer at Sanma Counselling Centre, was appointed as Office Assistant to Malampa Counselling Centre (MCC), worked as an MCC Counsellor from 2015, and was promoted to the role of MCC Community Educator in 2020



Vanuatu Women's Centre **EDUCATED** me
MOLD and **SHAPED** me
 Into having a purpose as an individual
 Most importantly as a **WOMAN**
 I know my rights
 I am more **RESILIENT**
FINANCIALLY I am independent
 I owe all that to Vanuatu Women's Centre
 I am forever grateful and acknowledge all that the Centre had done for me.

Edwina George: Transformation

I first came to work in Sanma Counselling Centre in 2015. And from there I came to find out the real me – that I am weak in many ways, weak to do decisions, weak to express my feelings and weak to express my rights. I have known that I have my rights, but not knowing how and when I can use them.

I have lived in a violent relationship for seven years before coming to work in VWC, and after coming to work in VWC, I have come to realise that I am a survivor of domestic violence. VWC has opened my mind set, and also taken me back to see my past experiences as a lesson learned. It has built me to be more effectively dealing with my weaknesses and given me more knowledge and strength about how and when I can better use my rights to benefit myself, my kids, and others around me.



Edwina George is a Counsellor with the Sanma Counselling Centre

*"I don't regret being single,
 because now I'm more
 confident and my kids are
 happy."*

It's been seven years now living as a single mother, but I felt more inspired, more empowered and more independent and I don't regret being single, because now I'm more confident with myself, and my kids are happy.

And it's working in VWC that did this transformation in me – through the trainings where VWC has educated me, and my experience in my job in VWC has given me more passion to help women to see themselves that they are not weak, but they are important, and they can do decisions that can benefit them and make them happy despite the hard challenges they face in life.

Grace Ralph: Mi no wandem i happen long ol nara woman

Name blong mi Grace Ralph. Mi blong Rah island long Motalava, hemia long Torba Province.

Mi bin wok long plante difdifren government mo private sectors bifo mi kam joenem team blong Vanuatu Women's Centre.

Long 2001, afta long wan DV workshop blong Vanuatu Women's Centre, mi bin kam olsem wan CAVAW member kasem 2010. Long 2011, establishment blong Torba Counselling Centre and mi wok olsem wan Counsellor kasem 2012 we mi kam olsem Project Officer kasem tete.

Mi feel so proud blong wok long Vanuatu Women's Centre from hemi mekem mi who I am today. Hemi growem up mi long way we i changem laef blong mi. Mi bin relaesem se mi bin wan victim mo survivor blong domestic violence mo tu mi bin relaesem se wanem we plante woman istap fesem long homes blong olgeta, hemi ol rabis fasin blong domestic violence we mifala i bin go tru long training and long mi, mi bin fesem ol rabis fasin long maret laef blong mi, and mi wandem se, wanem we i bin hapen long mi, mi no wandem i hapen long ol nara woman.

Mi bin suffered, controlled, neglected, embarrassed, luk/ting daon, treated as slave, used as a tool, blamed mo mi no gat any privileges nating blong mekem wanem mi wandem blong mekem.

Vanuatu Women's Centre hemi prosperem mi long plante samting we mi mo ol pikinini blong mi i wandem kat long laef blong mifala. Hemi givim plante training mo knowledge long mi blong mi save helpem ol narafala woman mo pikinini long ol fasin nogud we oli stap fesem.

Mi no save expressem mi wan how much we mi laekem wok long Vanuatu Women's Centre mo thank you so, so very much Vanuatu Women's Centre long evri samting we yu bin mekem long mi, mo mi bin kam blong relaesem se life hemi different and found out that as a woman, I am special in many different ways and I have my own rights we mi bin bon wetem blong live in a harmonious life, to be treated equally, to be protected, to be loved and care for.

Vanuatu Women's Centre, you have done so much for me and you will always be remembered.



Grace Ralph began as a CAVAW member, became a Counsellor with the Torba Counselling Centre in 2011, and was promoted to Project Officer in 2012

"Hemi growem up mi long way we i changem laef blong mi."



Grace photographs the VWC problem tree on violence against women that staff worked on together during the 2016 VWC Program Design Workshop

Angella Malisa: Mi lykem blong helpem ol woman, pikinini gel mo boy

Mi Angella Malisa. Since long 2019 mi bin kam wok long Vanuatu Women Centre. Mo taem mi ko blong statem wok mi no save wanem nao office or centre ya istap mekem. So taem mi stat blong wok olsem wan volunteer, ol staff oli stap encouragem mi blong readim ol prosa mo ol books we oli stap long shelves. Then mi stap karem ol books ya nao mi stap readim mo mi kam blong save smol about ol wok we emi stap mekem long centre. Mo tu mi kam blong save about services we centre istap provaedem blong helpem ol victims we oli stap ko tru long ol rabis fasin blong domestic violence.

Long 2018 July, mi move ikam long section blong counselling. Mo mi jes luk how ol woman, pikinini, gel mo yangfala boy we oli stap ko tru long ol rabis fasin ya. So mi lykem blong joinem Vanuatu Women Centre. From mi lykem blong helpem ol woman, pikinini gel mo boy we oli stap go tru long fasin blong Domestic Violence, we i stap affectem home blong olgeta. Mo tu blong save about ol raets blong olgeta mo ol real issues we oli stap facem long life blong olgeta.

Mo tu Vanuatu Women Centre hemi helpem mi personally long home blong mi wetem ol family blong mi mo tufala pikinini blong mi financially mo long ol narafala samting we mi needim long home blong mi.



Angella Malisa began as a volunteer at Malampa Counselling Centre, and is now a Counsellor there

Rachel Jerry: Mi become who I am

Vanuatu Women Centre hemi wan organisation we i helpem plante ol woman mo ol gel. Mo mi wan long olgeta. Mi wan naughty gel we mi bin involve lo plante samting wetem ol frens mo hemi no wan healthy life style.

Be taem mi kam wok lo Vanuatu Women Centre mi bin lanem fulap gudfala samting about life, and blong mekem right decision or choices. And today mi become who I am.

Rachel Jerry is a Volunteer at Sanma Counselling Centre



Sharline Sarai: The journey begins

I first came to know about Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC) when I attended a 1-week workshop organized by VWC with Young girls from Port Vila Town in the year 2012.

Later in 2013 I was asked by the former Coordinator Mrs Tahi, if I was interested to join the VWC team as a Volunteer. From there I started to educate myself with all the information on Violence against women and Human Rights by reading through the IEC (information, education and communications) material at the centre and attending workshops. From there it changed my pathway of life and I strongly believe and said to myself, "The journey has begun".

In 2014-2015 I was recruited to the position of Assistant Finance Officer and from there another milestone in my life continued. I was experiencing my dream unfold for the future but unfortunately God had other plans for me. My journey went a different direction.

Later in 2016 I was transferred to my new position the Office Assistant. As an office assistant to be the first person to greet and meet women, children coming to the centre with Bruises and Tears in their eyes. This caused me to stand firm and believe that Violence is not the solutions or Answer to any problems we face in our homes, community or Vanuatu as a whole, and so the "journey continues".

2017-2019 was a turning point in my life where I myself decided to join the VWC brave team of women, which is the Counselling Section as a Counsellor Advocate. To be honest a Counsellor's job is very hard and challenging, in the sense that as a counsellor you must not be judgmental, nor discriminatory, believe and support the victim, so that they feel they are being heard and that there is someone who is willing to assist them with whatever difficulty they are facing. And from there I started building up my character to be able to help other women and young children and including my own community. I was honoured to have the former coordinator Mrs.Tahi teach and guide me



Sharline Sarai began her journey with VWC as a volunteer, then was appointed as Finance Officer, Office Assistant, and Counsellor Advocate, before her current appointment as CAVAW Officer; she is shown above with her display for VWC's 2021 Open Day

"To be honest a Counsellor's job is very hard and challenging, in the sense that as a counsellor you must not be judgmental, nor discriminatory, believe and support the victim, so that they feel they are being heard and that there is someone who is willing to assist them with whatever difficulty they are facing. And from there I started building up my character to be able to help other women and young children and including my own community."

through my days as a Counsellor, she will always be my MENTOR and role model that I will always look up to. I would like to extend my gratitude to Fiji Women's Crises Centre (FWCC) for the trainings they had given me, through regional training program and also counsellor training.

"I would like to extend my gratitude to Fiji Women's Crises Centre (FWCC) for the trainings they had given me"

Further continuing on my VWC journey I was blessed to be promoted to CAVAW Officer (in 2020-2022). It is another great opportunity to work with women in remote areas with different backgrounds, experiences and challenges, for me it is a pleasure to work with them, assisting them to carry out programs and activities through the support of VWC. And I must say they are also the "experts" on the work VWC is doing the in communities.



SE Ambae workshop participants with Rolengas Lolo (PECC Project Officer, seated left) and Sharline Sarai (VWC CAVAW Officer, standing far right), which concluded with the re-establishment of SE Ambae CAVAW

VWC had also trained me on skills to facilitate training with Provincial CAVAWs, from each province, also skills in facilitating 5-day workshops on Gender, Violence against Women, Family Protection Act and Human Rights with women in many communities.

VWC is always a tremendous organisation that has shaped me and made me who I am today. I am so honoured and privileged to have worked alongside Mrs. Tahi who is an expert and mentor to me, I will always appreciate that, and I must admit I really Love my job.

The journey with VWC still continues wherever the waves of ending Violence against Women and Children takes me.

Since her appointment in 2020, and thanks to the allocation of funds from UN Women, Sharline Sarai has assisted to re-establish 3 of the 4 CAVAWs on Ambae. Ambae island had 4 very active CAVAWs before the volcano eruptions in 2017 and 2018, and resulted in evacuation and temporary and permanent locations which put a huge strain on all CAVAWs.

"CAVAWs are also the experts on the work VWC is doing the in communities."

Jenny Bui: VWC hemi givim save abaot laef blong wan human being

Papa blong mi blong Santo
mo mother blong mi blong
Ambrym. Mi born long Vila
mo mi live long Vila.

Long 2010 papa blong ol
pikinini blong mi ikam wok
long Malekula, mekem seh mi
kam live wetem hem long
Malekula.

Taem we mi kam live wetem
papa blong ol pikinini blong
mi long Malekula, mi bin
fesem plante fasin blong
vaelens we hemi stap mekem
long mi. Mi bin fesem had
taem tumas, be from mi no
blong Malekula and too mi
nogat family blong mi blong
oli save helpem mi wetem ol
pikinini.



Jenny Bui is a former Volunteer and Counsellor with Malampa Counselling Centre (MCC), shown above (back row, third from right) with other members of the MCC staff team

Long 2015 we Malampa Counselling Centre ikam setup long Malekula, Lakatoro afta mi bin go wok olsem wan Volunteer long Malampa Counselling Centre long 2015. Long 2017 mi work olsem Office Assistant kasem long 2019 mi work olsem wan counsellor.

Mi Jenny Bui mi wandem talem bigfala thankyou i go long Vanuatu Women Centre from ol gud gudfala blessing we i kivim long laef blong mi wetem ol pikinini blong mi. Mo too ol family blong mi wetem ol trening we i kivim long mi.

VWC hemi kivim mi save blong mi, abaot laef blong wan Human Being, o abaot ol Rabis fasin we i hapen long laef blong ol woman, gel, boy mo ol pikinini wetem ol disabilities.

Mi Jenny Bui mi wok mo stap oltaem blong helpem ol woman, gel, boy, mo ol disabilities we ol stap fesem vaelens long laef blong olgeta.

THANK YOU TUMAS VWC, ALWAYS WITH YOU.

“VWC hemi kivim mi save blong mi, abaot laef blong wan Human Being, o abaot ol Rabis fasin we i hapen long laef blong ol woman, gel, boy mo ol pikinini wetem ol disabilities.”

Grace Antoine: Mi kam blong learnem fulap something

Mi nem blong mi Grace Antoine. Mi blong Malekula, mo mi kat 25 years old. Since long 2018 long manis blong June, mi bin startem work long VWC. Mo long taem ya mi work olsem wan volunteer.

However, long taem ya mi no save about work ya, mi bin save se hemi ofis blong ol woman. Be taem mi startem blong work mi start blong learnem ol work insaed long ofis. Mo kam blong understandem ol work we VWC istap mekem. Too wetem hemia, mi kam blong learnem fulap samting especially ol woman, ol pikinini, mo ol disabilities. As well VWC i helpem mi bigwan long home blong mi long salary we mi tekem. Mi save assist blong pem skul fees blong ol siblings blong mi mo ol basic needs blong mi long home.

Lastly this year 2021 hemi 3 years blong mi we mi work long VWC, mo mi stap long probation yet olsem wan counsellor. Mo mi wantem acknowledgem VWC from we ofis ya nao mi learnem fulap samting we i save helpem life blong mi olsem wan woman, mo helpem family blong mi mo community blong mi.



Grace Antoine is a Counsellor with MCC

Vionnga Daniel: Hemi helpem plante family

Mi nem blong mi Vionnga. Mi bin kam startem wok lo Malampa Counselling Centre lo July 2013. Mo hemi festaem blong mi blong kam work lo Malampa Counselling Centre, olsem wan volunteer. Taem mi kam work mi no save se wanem ya office blong vaelens. Taem mi kam stap work mi stap save smol smol work blong VWC. Mo mi luk se hemi helpem plante family tu long home blong olgeta. Ol pikinini gel mo ol woman disability.

Mi work long Malampa Counselling Centre lo 3 years. Long 2021 long manis February oli movem mi i ko blong tekemap position blong Office Assistant. Mo long June 2021, we hemi festaem blong mi tu blong attendem wan retreat. Mo mi glad we mi stap long taem ia we mi save lanem sam niu topic long taem ya.

VWC hemi helpem mi plante, long mi mo home blong mi. Hemi helpem mifala long in terms of money, kakai, bill blong light mo water. Mo hemi helpem mi blong growem up smol gel blong mi. Mi wandem talem thankyou lo VWC mo management blong save tekem mi blong helpem mi mo family blong mi.



Vionnga Daniel started at MCC as a Volunteer, and is now Office Assistant

Alicia Leimara Kalorib: Be the change you want to see happen

Vanuatu Women's Centre. VWC in short. Otherwise known as "Ofis blong ol mama" or "Ofis blong Valens agensem ol woman" by many mamas and manples.

To me it is neither that. I got to know the office through my sister who was working here. I never really understood what it was really or what it was all about. I do vaguely remember being a client there once but that was it. Otherwise to me it was my sister's workplace. Now? Now it's neither that either, as I myself started working there as a Counsellor.

It's magical what a place does to you when you finally decide to open your heart and mind to learn and unlearn. I say it's magic because it is. It changes you as a whole, your perspective in life and makes you ponder and question the status norm of society and ask yourself the question, "Do I really want my children/younger siblings/nieces/nephews to grow up in this kind of society/community?" And from there the fear and anxiety of many parents lies as they build fences to protect their youngsters, not realizing that the very fence they've build would one day suffocate and trap them and that the only way to get over it was through it and the power to overcome the suffocating trap was within themselves in their very daily choice or decision-makings, if they really make the effort to learn, understand and realize that violence is not the answer and will never be the answer to anything. I am not going down that lane of stating all the reasons of why violence is not the answer or even not going to state examples of it. But what I will ask you is to just look within your community, your family, and yourself and ask yourself, is violence really worth it?"

Educator Arleen Lorrance was right when she said "be the change you want to see happen" because all Vanuatu Women's Centre wanted to do was just that. To be the change in the lives of women and men in communities within Vanuatu and help them better understand and realize that violence is never truly the answer to whatever soever question.

So to me, I am part of that change and am an agent of change. Not because my sister used to work there or because I worked there. But because I too have now realised and have come to truly believe that violence is not and will never be the answer to any questions or issues, and that change can only come from within not without. It all starts with you.



Leimara Kalorib is a Counsellor with the Vanuatu Women's Centre

"But what I will ask you is to just look within your community, your family, and yourself and ask yourself, is violence really worth it? ..."

"I am an agent of change ... because I too have now realised ... that change can only come from within ..."

Sandria Worer: My hope, my home

Vanuatu Women Centre
My hope My Home
I just want you to know.

That my life was
Shaped by you
When I am struggling with endeavour
Or dealing with violence
To you is where I usually go.

When trouble is looming
When problems draw near
Just know that you'll always be.

The one I turn to
The one I call for
The one I pull closest

Vanuatu Women Centre
You're my consultant and my teacher
And my informer



Sandria was a Volunteer at Vanuatu Women's Centre for several years before her current role as Counsellor with the Torba Counselling Centre

Melanie Ulas: Mi lanem plenty new samting

Mi nem blong mi Melanie. Mi work long MCC olsem wan Volunteer. Years we ipas mi no save tumas long ol wok blong VWC. Be time mi stat long wok long 3 February 2021, mi stat blong save mo lanem wok blong centre.

Long June 2021 i bin kat wan staff retreat we istap long Erakor Island Resort. From there mi lanem plenty new samting.

Mi wantem talem thankyou long VWC, tru long save mo opportunity we i givim, hemi helpem mi mo family i bigwan tumas.

Melanie Ulas is a Volunteer with the Malampa Counselling Centre



Kerry Natou: First male staff

My name is Kerry Natou, my mother is from Futuna and my father from Tanna. I knew about the VWC very early through my late mother.

My mother joined VWC when I was very young, she was a volunteer in 1993. My father was a Vanuatu Mobile Force officer but died when we lived in Luganville. So, we lived with mother. She later became a full-time staff and brought us children to live with her in Vila. She was employed as full-time Counsellor in the safe house from 1995 to 1999, then continued working as a Counsellor until she passed on. I was going to school too.

I knew about the VWC from the commitment, experiences and information from my mother. She paid for our education, rent, food, clothes, everything.

In 2013, I was recruited by VWC to clean the office grounds and to be a handyman. I attended training on violence against women to increase my knowledge and respect. I like my job, but to be honest most of the time it is challenging working with women, in terms of Vanuatu as a male-dominated society. But growing up with mother was an eye opener on issues relating to violence against women. I was empowered by her teaching and sharing at home.

Within my job I also worked as Security, it was tiring but tried my best to look after the VWC property. Sometimes I assist the VWC Lawyer to serve sermons or statement to defendants or courts. I am grateful that VWC is "my home" since 2013.

I was the FIRST MALE staff of the VWC. It was interesting. I learnt a lot from the female staff and they treated me well and with respect.

Thank you for my job and for my training. I believe this is where I belong.



The late, much-loved Lily Natu Tawari (long-time Counsellor with Vanuatu Women's Centre, below), and her son Kerry Natou, Gardener and Handyman at VWC (above)

"Growing up with mother was an eye opener on issues relating to violence against women. I was empowered by her teaching and sharing at home."

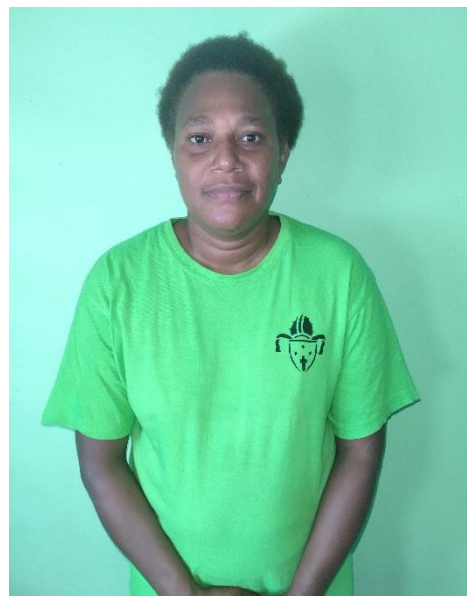
Bensalyn Wogale: Hemi changem mi

Mi nem blong mi Bensalyn Wogale. Mi blong Mota Island, hemia long northern part blong Vanuatu long Torba province. Mi kat 32 years old.

Mi start wok olsem wan KAVAW member long year 2012, then long sem yia mi kam wok long Torba Counselling Centre long Torba, we hemi branch blong Vanuatu Women's Centre olsem wan volunteer. Long 2013, mi wok olsem Office Assistant kasem tete.

Mi glad tumas blong wok long Vanuatu Women's Centre from hemi changem mi. I helpem family blong mi mo i mekem se mi save gud ol issues blong domestic vaelens se ol fasin ya oli ol rabis fasin we mi bin stap fesem long laef blong mi bifo.

Mi wantem talem thank you tumas long Vanuatu Women's Centre from human rights blong mi we mi save gud mo i mekem who I am today.



Bensalyn Wogale began her work with VWC as a CAVAW member, and now works as Office Assistant with the Torba Counselling Centre

Bastiana Kota: You make the sunshine

*You make the sunshine on a cloudy day
When people are sick, especially ladies and children
They run to you, you kiss their pain away*

*Your tender voice took away their fears
Your hand that wiped away their tears
The love you give so honest and pure
Keeping all safe and secure
You make flower bloom in the spring
It was you who fixed their broken wing*

*Vanuatu Women's Centre
Because of you we know love and respect
The guardian angel and defender from Vanuatu
Women's Centre*



Bastiana Kota is Office Assistant at the Tafea Counselling Centre

Margret Tekak Nolen: Who knew I would be doing all this?

Before VWC I was always short-tempered, annoyed and had low-self-esteem. I had the best education growing up but I felt insecure with jobs and relationships. Everyone knew me as a difficult woman because I get what I want, I dominate my relationships and I constantly ignore others wellbeing.

2017 was my first year in VWC and it opened my eyes. I felt ashamed and realised my faults. I not only see myself but everyone around me through the gender lens. The realization made me echo every learning from workshops, brochures and advice, to everyone that mattered to me. It changed me tremendously and I started to admire the new me.

Second to fifth year into VWC, I am a different woman. Helping women fight for justice, advising women on their human rights and advocating for a judicial system that recognizes and ensures that women enjoy their human rights free from all forms of discrimination. Through mentoring I became a facilitator, facilitating gender-relation training with youths, women, men and conducting 1st stage of male advocacy. Who knew I would be doing all this? Well, VWC saw the potential in me and gave me the opportunity to grow.

Today, words cannot express the full measure of gratitude I have for VWC. Like a mother, she nurtured and mould me into a unique woman. The passion and dedication made me conquer uncharted areas and now I speak to ending violence against women, girls and children throughout Vanuatu

Creating advocates and empowering women is done every single day at VWC. Unique and a prominent figure, VWC shines to all women, girls and children out there as a light house, showing the way to happiness and a better life. In joining the past and present notable women who carry the light, I salute Marilyn Tahigogona for the vision, passion and dedication she has for VWC and for also believing in me.



Margret Tekak Nolen is a Lawyer with the Vanuatu Women's Centre

"VWC saw the potential in me and gave me the opportunity to grow."

"Creating advocates and empowering women is done every single day at VWC."

Noelin Lava: Oh! VWC

Oh ! VWC Oh ! VWC

The Mother of all women and Girls

*You were as big as an umbrella that protects
every people from different colours and from
different race*

*You gave me water to cool
me down,
in terms of my problems and troubles*

*Every people from elsewhere smells the sweet
scent of your free
counselling service*

*As a woman or a girl
I appreciate and wish you
good luck in your future
plannings*

*Oh ! VWC Oh !VWC,
The fastest and
The biggest
Free Service!!!!!!*



*Noelin Lava is a Counsellor with the Tafea
Counselling Centre*

Lisa Ishmael-Laban: Life goes on and so should we

I have survived experiences of family violence. The life we went through was full of ups and downs. I always felt scared, anxious, have trouble sleeping, have trouble concentrating, and did not feel safe when he was drunk and he was around us.

I lived a life seeing mum with bruises, seeing them arguing and fighting in front of us. That caused too much pain and unfortunately that was not what we expected from them. We expected a happy and harmonious family relationship.

As a result of family violence, we were raised only by our mother. She was the sole bread-winner and could not afford to pay for my school fees. I had to leave school for one year and stayed at home. With the help and support from other family members, I attended school the following years until I reached year 11. Mum found it hard to continue paying for my school fees so I had to stop school again to find a job.

“As a result of family violence, we were raised only by our mother. She was the sole bread-winner and could not afford to pay for my school fees. ... I had to stop school to find a job.”



Lisa Ishmael-Laban began work at VWC as the Office Assistant, then became Finance Officer, Office Manager and is currently Program Manager

On Wednesday the 2nd June 2010, I started working at VWC as an Office Assistant. My role mainly was to meet and greet clients coming in the centre for Counselling or seeking legal information. I accepted the job because to me it's one new learning environment and I can get useful information from our past experiences.

As a young woman who saw my mum with bruises, when I see clients coming to the centre with bruises and broken arms and/or legs, it makes me stand firm and believe that I can make a change in my life. Despite of the challenges we faced in the past, I am determined not to face the same situation again.

To be honest, this organisation saves a lot of lives and assists a lot of women and girls to move out from the violence in their lives to a better and happy life. Working at Vanuatu Women's Centre is not by mistake. Today, I take pride for what I have become and have achieved through this organisation. I am blessed with the achievements. I take my hats out to this organisation and to my former boss Mrs Merilyn Tahi who supported me and pushed me to continue with my education.

“... this organisation saves a lot of lives and assists a lot of women and girls to move out from the violence in their lives to a better and happy life.”

Through her trust in me that I am able to do it, I have now graduated from the University of the South Pacific with a Diploma in Business Management.

I am now happily married and have three handsome sons. Having children did not stop me from continuing with my education. I keep moving forward, life goes on and so should we.

I am where I am today because I was fortunate to have great mentors who were willing to take a bet on me and provide meaningful opportunities for growth. I am blessed to have Mrs Merilyn Tahī as a mentor, a mother, and a boss. She gave me her shoulder to lean on. Merilyn is someone who will just listen as tears roll down your face and remind you that no matter how far you've fallen, you'll get up again, stronger and wiser than before.

Furthermore, I also have learnt from the best consultant who taught me and shared her knowledge on financial systems and budget preparation and budget reports to donors. I am grateful for continuous assistance to this very day. There's a saying that goes - "what a teacher writes on the blackboard of life can never be erased." Thank you, Dr. Juliet Hunt, you are one of the few people in my life who has helped make me into who I am today.

Both Merilyn and Juliet have been very instrumental in my career. I really appreciate their mentorship and guidance. Thank you tumas.



Lisa Ishmael-Laban(back left) is one of many VWC and branch staff mentored and trained over many years by Merilyn Tahī to facilitate trainings and workshops, such as the provincial CAVAW training with Torba CAVAWs in May 2019

2010, I was one of the luckiest person to be part of VWC.

As part of the team, we learnt to be feminist, empowered and be strong women not only in our minds but to be able to work as a team in solidarity, advocating to end VAWC throughout Vanuatu. Eleven good years have passed and time flew by so fast. I know in myself that as a person, I had grown, I had learnt alot with good achievements in life. Thanking my families, friends and work colleagues for their patience, help, time and teachings to me. Many thanks to my mentors (Merilyn Tahī & Dr. Juliet Hunt). I truly appreciate everything that you all have done for me.

Drawing below shows my life journey at VWC (with so much blessings and trainings).

Thank you Vanuatu Women's Centre.

2010

Started working at VWC



Finance Report presentation at CAVAW Training

2011

2012 Financial Reports at Prov.CAVAW Training

RTP Training Fiji



2013

First Finance helper



2014

First Training session with Vila Anglican Mothers Union

2015

Started attending Counsellor Trainings apart from Finance Duties

2016 Promoted to Office Manager VWC

2017 Facilitate a session at Counsellors Training



2018 Attended Adaptive Leadership Training by FWCC

2019 Started studying at USP Assist and follow Merilyn Tahī to Solomon Isl. to assist in Family Support Centre Trainings

2020

Promoted to Program Manager & 3rd Helper in Finance

2021 Diploma in Office Management



Lisa Laban, September 2021

Veruta Kalo: A blessing to me

I came to work at Sanma Counselling Centre in 2019. When I first came in to work as a Volunteer, I had no idea about what is VWC and its services. To me, I felt that it's going to be a new experience of work, and it's also a blessing to me. My late beloved father always said to me that one fine day I will receive a big blessing and with that blessing I will help my bothers and sisters and also my community. Working as a Volunteer and then later as a Counsellor, I have learned a lot and gained a lot of knowledge on issues that are affecting women and children. It helped change me too, on how I looked at women.



Veruta Kalo began her work with Sanma Counselling Centre as a Volunteer, and is now a Counsellor with SCC

"Going out with my Project Officer and Community Educator to do mobile counselling and awareness talks in the communities has helped me a lot to understand the issues and how women can deal with the issues they are facing in their homes and communities. ... And I am so happy because more women are coming in from my village now to seek information and counselling."

Working at VWC has changed the way my community looked at me. Before, they looked at me in a way that they discriminate me and underestimate me. Now, working with VWC has made them see that I am someone, and I have proven myself, and now they respect me and even my husband has seen that change in me.

Going out with my Project Officer and Community Educator to do mobile counselling and awareness talks in the communities has helped me a lot to understand the issues and how women can deal with the issues they are facing in their homes and communities. And I am so happy because more women are coming in from my village now to seek information and counselling. That gave me the understanding that my community has recognised the organisation I'm working for, and how effectively it helps women. I am so proud that now I have gained my community's respect and happy also that they have slowly come to see that importance of making good decisions, especially women with the information we provide.

Today people in my community respect me which makes me very pleased to serve them more with more information. I am so thankful to VWC to make my community respect me and my job, and see me as a leader.

Thank you VWC. Long live VWC. I will never give up on you, VWC.

Latanya Bice: The other side of the road

Long 2012 mi bin attendem wan 1 wik wokshop long Vanuatu National Provident Fund (VNPf) we Vanuatu Women Center (VWC) hemi bin runem wetem ol yangfala gels we oli kamaot long ol difren komuniti long Port Vila. Long taem ya mifala I bin around 40+ participants evriwan. Foma Coordinator blong VWC we hemi Marilyn Tahia nao hemi bin runem training ya. Mi bin lanem fulap samting tru long training ya, sam long ol main samting we mi lanem long training ya hemi Domestik Vaelens mo Human Raets. Long taem ya mifala I bin lanem blong sherem storian blong mifala long wan wan komuniti we mifala I kamaot long hem mo hemi bin helpem mifala blong mifala I save fil confident blong toktok. Long wokshop ya mi lanem blong mi save respectem tingting blong ol narafala fren blong mi mo tu mi kam blong luksave ol difren fasin blong domestik vaelens we neva bin save long hem. Insaed long training ya mi bin lanem tu fulap bigfala toktok we mi no bin save. Mi bin hapi tu se mi bin lanem aboutem "HUMAN RAET".

"... mi kam blong luksave ol difren fasin blong domestik vaelens we neva bin save long hem. ... Mi bin hapi tu se mi bin lanem aboutem "HUMAN RAET"."



Latanya Bice first learned about violence against women at workshops specifically for young women in 2012 and 2013, and joined VWC as Volunteer in 2013; she now works as Counsellor at VWC

Long 2013 long manis blong Januari, mi bin attendem training second taem long Melanisia Hotel we Coordinator hemi bin runem wetem ol semak participants. Long Training ya mifala I bin lanem blong mekem presentation blong domestik vaelens, mo tu hao nao mifala I save helpem wan victim blong domestik vaelens. Mifala I bin lanem tu smol aboutem gender. Long same yia ya nomo, mi kam wok long VWC olsem wan Volunteer blong mekem filing, banking, klinim ofis, help blong preperem ol materials blong wan wokshop mo assistim receptionist blong ansarem ol call mo assistim ol klaen we I kam long senta. Mi wok olsem wan Volunteer kasem long 2017.

Mi kambak lo wok olsem wan Volentia long 2019 olsem mo mi move iko long wan niu position. Insaed long new position ia we mi stap long hem, mi bin ko thru lo sam workshop mo trening we senta hemi givim long mi mo tu mi bin pat long narafala trening olsem: Young Women Leadership Workshop, Phone Counselling, Get Safe Online mo Intersectionality workshop we ol narafala Organisations oli bin ranem. Ol training mo ol workshops we mi bin, hemi helpem mi blong bildim capacity skills blong mi save usum lo wokples mo komuniti blong mi.

"Nara samting we hemi kivim mi ability blong save toktok lo foret long ol man, kivim mi konfidens mo Senta ikivim save lo mi blong kat strong tingting blong serem mo kivim aot ol infomesen abaot senta."

Ol skills we mi lanem long training ya, blong helpem ol nara fala woman we oli stap facem ol rabis fasin blong vaelens mo educatem mo empawarem olgeta blong luk save wanem hemi iraet mo rong, wanem nao oli save mekem sapos oli stap ko tru long ol hat taem. Nara samting we hemi kivim mi ability blong save toktok lo foret long ol man, kivim mi konfidens mo Senta ikivim save lo mi blong kat strong tingting blong serem mo kivim aot ol infomesen abaot senta. Hemi helpem mi too long ol fasin blong mi long respect mo helpem mi blong save mekem decision blong mi.

Wetem ol samting we mi bin ko thru long hem long ol workshops mo trenings, hemi empowerem mi blong kam wan strong woman, blong save stanap blong toktok mo advocate abaot ol rabis fasin blong Domestik Vaelens. Hemi jenjem ol fasin blong mi mo hemi lanem mi blong kat respekt long ol decision blong ol naraman, mo hemi helpem mi blong save mekem own decision blong mi.

Wetem evri samting ya, mi talem tankio long centre we I save moldem mi mo shapem mi blong mi I kam wan diferen pesen tedei.

Afta long every workshop we mi bin go long hem, mi kam blong luk save fulap samting. Wan long ol samting nao hemi ol "GENDER ROLES TINKTINK" we yumi stap practisim stat long ol apu blong yumi I kam kasem tete. Wan long ol nara samting we centre hemi helpem mi long hem, hemi mekem mi kamoat long comfort zone blong mi blong mi save expressem ol filings mo tinktink blong mi olsem wan young gel. Wetem wan strong custom background we mi kamaot long hem I mekem se mi stap insaed long wan darkshell we I holem taet mi mo disconnectem mi long wan nara life aotside. Eno hemia nomo be mi stat blong buildim wan bridge mo connection wetem ol nara man mo ol organisations. Wetem help blong centre thru long ol training we mi pat long hem I kam blong bidim up lidaship skilis blong mi, developem confidence blong mi, motivate mi, mo helpem mi blong mi save sapotem tu ol youngfala gel long community mo aelan blong mi as a whole.

"Centre hemi bidim up mi mo fidim mi wetem fulap samting we mi belive se ol nara fala young gel tu around long Vanuatu oli nid blong save."

Mi belive tu se wetem ol sapot blong center, center hemi createm wan new person long mi. Mi kam blong tekem up wan role tu blong mi save help blong leadim family blong mi mo stand againstem discrimination se from mi wan gel bae mi no save take part long any decision making. Wetem hemia mi mas usum ol information mo skills blong mi blong mi advocate blong mekem family blong mi I luk save se yumi every wan I bon equal mo mi gat raet tu blong givim tinktink blong mi sapos mi no glad long decision we I stap. Centre hemi bidim up mi mo fidim mi wetem fulap samting we mi belive se ol nara fala young gel tu around long Vanuatu oli nid blong save.

Mi glad mo mi fil lucky tumas blong mi save pat long Team blong Vanuatu Women Centre since 2012. Mi bin kam insaed olsem wan young gel wetem wan empty bag long hand blong mi. Tete mi kam wan mature woman we mi lanem fulap samting. Vanuatu Women Centre hemi providem fulap resourses long mi mo mi fil se basket blong mi I stap fulap. And mi believe se centre bae hemi continue blong sapotem mi mo bae hemi continue blong shapem mi mo moldem mi long fulap year yet we bae I kam. Mi belive mo mi wandem tumas sapos every nara young fala gel raon long Vanuatu I save kam blong understanem GENDER EQUALITY mo HUMAN RAETS blong mekem se yumi save changem fulap samting mo downem DOMESTIC VALENCE long country blong yumi. So mi belive se wetem sapot blong yumi every wan, yumi save mekem Vanuatu hemi kam wan SAFE MO HEALTHY ples blong yumi save LIVE long hem.

Vinnia Tohkvanu: VWC educated me

I first came to work at Sanma Counseling Centre in 2017 and when I worked as a Volunteer, I had no idea about VWC. Later on, I came to understand more on the services of VWC, and it gave more idea of how I can handle my own issues and learn to deal with issues in my church and my community.

Since working with the VWC, it helps me to know more of the important role of myself. It educates me more on the human rights that I can exercise daily. Also, it shaped me from my bad attitude and it empowered me when I am weak. VWC gives me hope when I am hopeless. VWC supports me when I am in need. It encourages me when I am discouraged. It gives me knowledge about how to make good decisions in my life.

Through VWC my husband comes to know how to respect a woman, especially me at home, so I will never ever forget VWC because through her I am happy and blessed.

VWC sees me as a woman, as a human being that needs to be treated equally, with the same equal rights, and it gives me a better outlook for the future. Salute VWC. God bless VWC. Long live VWC.



Vinnia Tohkvanu is a Counsellor with the Sanma Counselling Centre

Joyline Kenneth: An incredible leader

I started working with Vanuatu Women's Centre in 2018 as a Volunteer and was promoted to Office Assistant in 2019 till 2022.

I had no idea and never thought of such an organisation back then. I was a naughty girl. I've been involved in many bad things with friends and didn't want to go to school anymore. And that's when my aunt told me to apply to Vanuatu Women's Centre as a Volunteer because she was VWC's client, so I did.

I know for sure that I went through domestic violence many times but I never knew that domestic violence existed and it was a crime. Until I started working at Vanuatu Women's Centre and attended Gender Based Violence training that helped me understand different types of Domestic Violence, how they've started in a household and how to deal or solve them.



Joyline Kenneth is Office Assistant with the Vanuatu Women's Centre

Back then I was a shy little girl, afraid to stand or speak in front of many people. But through Marilyn Tahī, she made me the woman I am today.

Thank you, Marilyn Tahī, you are a legacy, thank you for empowering and inspiring me. I am honoured to have learned and been mentored by you. Someone that I've known once said that it takes an incredible leader to make a difference and I am honoured that it is you that I am inspired by. Thank you again for your leadership and teachings.

Trisha Leodoro: Cross path

My first memories of Vanuatu Women Centre were during my childhood years, my aunt Marilyn would take me along with her to work during weekends and on some occasions, she would take me along with her to their campaigns and special events. She would engage me in some activities especially Children's Day. Not only was I engaged in these different ways, but I was also taught about being safe and what my rights were as a child. The idea I had back then about the centre was that it was just a centre for women.

I emerged from a broken family background and I was always quiet and shy, but my teen years were quite rebellious and it became a reason for an encounter with VWC. After these childhood experiences, I first came to VWC in 2011 as a volunteer when I was heavily pregnant. I mostly helped with filing and cleaning.

My second encounter was after I had 2 children and was jobless. In 2017 I was approached by the Coordinator for a volunteer position as an Office Assistant in order to relieve the Office Assistant who was on maternity leave. Back then for me it was just about being financially stable.

Fortunately, during the years spent with VWC I came to understand the real depth of the work that VWC was doing. I realized that the centre was a safe haven for women and built women up in many special ways. I attended many trainings, and through the trainings and counselling I learnt more about my rights and responsibilities. These have helped me to build myself in every aspect of my life.

VWC has empowered me in many special ways and has given me a reason to believe in myself and make my own decisions. Looking back from my old image, I realised I have come to a crossed path with a different woman, an empowered woman who is no longer afraid to speak out.

VWC has given me a different perspective in my life as a worker and as woman. Somehow it no longer becomes a reason for me being financially stable, but it creates an urge to help other women and girls to gain their self-worth and achieve justice.

VWC has shaped me to the person I am today.



Trisha Leodoro began her work at VWC as a Volunteer, and now works as a Counsellor

Anastashia Kalsakau: My learning from working on this book

In my personal view, VWC develops women and girls in gender equality and empowers women and girls in all aspects of life. VWC plays a very vital role in developing and advocating for human rights for this country.

I have been here for a year; I have not attended training but I did attend a few workshops in my first year. I only knew about women and girls coming to the Centre to deal with domestic violence issues, that was it. Slowly I started to know what VWC does in counselling women and girls, going out to communities to make awareness and advocating for people on their human rights while doing community education, lobbying for women's rights, violence on women and girls research, male advocates assisting women who are facing domestic violence in their communities in all islands in Vanuatu.



Anastashia Kalsakau is VWC's Digital Communications Officer

Also, I have met with former and current staff who did incredible things for the Centre. A few of them are the survivors of domestic violence themselves and some of them had attended trainings and workshops which gave them skills and experience in their working areas, and have confidence to speak to people at different levels about issues of violence against women and girls in their homes, communities and the nation as a whole.

I have learned how this Centre has helped women and the staff and the male advocates who have broken barriers for the women and girls in gender norms and culture. I am glad to know that it is a legacy for the Centre. There is so much criticism people say about the Centre but you readers need to know this book about how the Centre grew from the very beginning until today, how it changes men and women's life. I can say that because today we are living with the legacy of the Founding Mother of the Vanuatu Women's Centre, Marilyn Tah, for 3 decades in her leadership role as a Coordinator of the Centre, currently the Technical Advisor for Vanuatu Women's Centre. I am grateful to have met and worked with her and know her leadership path.

Today I see and witness that she has changed women's life because of the courage, the passion and the leadership she has. And the other 2 founding mothers Elizabeth Mermer and Janet Saksak, who have stood up in the very beginning, also the VWC Volunteers in the rural areas who stood beside to work with the Centre, the former, the current staff and male advocates. Not forgetting also, the consultants of the VWC - Dr Juliet Hunt and Danielle Roubin. You all have done and still continue to do such amazing work for the Centre.

I have known VWC more in my first year here and through my job activities especially my involvement in this VWC Story Project.

"I have met with former and current staff who did incredible things for the Centre."

Tatavola Matas: Learning from the experiences of women

I came to know Vanuatu Women's Centre through my late mother Hanson Mataskelekele. My mum was a trustee of the Vanuatu Women's Centre. I became a mother at 20 years of age, and studying at the University of South Pacific, Emalus Campus. So, while studying, I have to find some form of employment to help me with my daughter. I became a VWC volunteer in 2003, running errands, answering the phone calls and helping at the Centre. In 2004, the then Office Assistant was awarded a scholarship to further her studies, and so I became the VWC Office Assistant. I read the brochures and booklets and seemed to understand the definition of Domestic Violence. I saw clients walking in and out of the Centre and seem to know why they come to access our services, but still do not understand the dimensions of gender relations and Violence Against Women and Girls.

In 2005, I was awarded a scholarship by the New Zealand Aid for full-time studies to complete my Law Degree. I completed my law degree along with my Professional Diploma in Legal Practice in 2008. Through my own experiences of Domestic Violence during my studies and thereafter, I understood more why women needed the services provided by VWC.

A vacancy for a Legal Officer was advertised in 2009, and so in January 2010, I was appointed as the Legal Officer. As per the Legal Practitioner's Act, I had to practice under the supervision of an unconditionally registered legal practitioner, thus, Mr. Colin Leo assisted in supervising my work in that manner. Court experiences were something else, because I had to attend court by myself, and learnt as I went. I appreciated the assistance of former Magistrates such as Late Mrs. Rita Naviti, Late Mrs. Nesbeth Wilson, Mr. Jimmy Garae, and Mr. Stephen Felix; who were patient enough to allow a beginner to make mistakes and learn from them. I remember my first court case in the Supreme Court with the Chief Justice and I was lectured upon for almost 2 hours along with the opposing counsel - it was way past lunch time, and my stomach was rumbling inside the Chief Justice's Chambers.

Apart from my work as a Legal Officer, I attended workshops as well to run the legal awareness sessions, mainly talking about the Family Protection Act and explaining other family law legislations such as the Child Maintenance Act, Family Maintenance Act, Matrimonial Causes Act and other legislations and the criminal legal process and the civil legal process.

In 2011, I was honoured to undergo a Gender Training of Trainers training facilitated by Dr. Juliet Hunt at Pacific Harbour, Flji. I remember Juliet apologizing to us before the training started, because she mentioned that by the end of the training, everything we view or come across, we will view it from a gender lens. Juliet's training had indeed opened my



Tatavola Matas was appointed Coordinator in 2021; this photo was taken when Vanuatu's Office of Public Prosecutions signed a MOU with VWC in 2021, after many years of liaison and advocacy from VWC

"...everything we view or come across, we will view it from a gender lens."

eyes on the existing inequalities and biases towards women. After Juliet's training, I sat in a Counsellor training with the other counsellors – colleagues from VWC and the Pacific facilitated by FWCC. Although I am not a Counsellor, it was important for me to understand counselling from a 'survivor centred-rights based approach', as I was working directly with Counsellors and their clients.

In February 2013, I represented VWC and the Pacific Women's Network to attend the 57th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 57) in New York. The theme priority of that particular CSW was Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. There was an opportunity to present the VWC's CAVAW Strategy and the work of CAVAWs at an NGO side event.

Later on In 2013, Marilyn told me to follow her to Tanna for her to run a workshop with the Nikoletan Island Council of Chiefs. I remember complaining to my other colleague without Marilyn's knowledge that I would be wasting a week on Tanna, without any progress on my clients' cases. As I look back, those days were the early days of Marilyn mentoring me to become a trainer. I sat

"As I look back, those days were the early days of Marilyn mentoring me to become a trainer."

in the workshop taking notes in my note book, but then out of the blue Marilyn would ask me to explain something to the participants, whether it was the law or a legal concept or just to talk about clients' experiences or work experiences. After that training, I followed Marilyn to other Male Leader's Workshops for her to facilitate the trainings. Through these experiences, I also learnt that I must familiarize myself with the amendments in other laws as well (not directly linked to our training) because the people in the community would ask about it. During one of our trainings, a leader challenged us that "Famili Proteksen Loa hemi kam outsaed", meaning it is a law imposed on Vanuatu. I then explained the processes of passing a bill to become law, and how their very own Members of Parliament are involved in making laws for our country. After our discussion, the participants were glad that they learnt something new. It also made me realize that importance of civic education in our communities. Providing training and giving information to people gives me a sense of satisfaction, because I know with the information gained, people will be able to make a change in their family and community.

Through VWC, I had the opportunity to attend regional trainings and meetings under the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women (PWNAVAW) facilitated by Shamima Ali and other facilitators, as well as trainings from RRRT/SPC (Regional Rights and Resources Team / The Pacific Community). These different trainings empowered me to be who I am today. In 2014, I was appointed Deputy Coordinator to assist Marilyn in managing the VWC, and was appointed Coordinator in 2021.

The work of VWC has really advanced from 2003 to the present time. The legal department which used to be a '1-person department' has now grown to include 3 Legal Officers and a Police Liaison Officer'. This is a testament of the need for the services provided by VWC and the need for increased accessible and/or affordable legal representation for women.

I acknowledge Marilyn Tahi for her trust and belief in me that I can do it. She saw my potential, and groomed me to be who I am today through her mentoring. Professionally, I am a lawyer, however, my in-depth knowledge on gender relations, EVAWG and Human Rights is gained through the VWC, Dr. Juliet Hunt, the FWCC, the PWNAVAW but most importantly the experiences of the women – the VWC clients and other women in Vanuatu and in the Pacific over the years.



Just some of the VWC and branch staff who have shared their experiences, journeys, achievements and challenges in this book from Torba Counselling Centre (top left), Penama Counselling Centre (top right), VWC in Port Vila (middle), Tafea Counselling Centre (bottom left), and Sanma Counselling Centre (bottom right); the Malampa Counselling Centre staff team is shown in this chapter above with Jenny Bui's story.

Chapter 5:

Why Vanuatu needs the Vanuatu Women's Centre

VWC CAVAW song: Ol woman raon Vanuatu

*Ol woman raon Vanuatu
Yumi stanap tugeta
Blong faet agensem ol rabis fasin
We istap spoelem gud yumi
We istap givim ded long yumi
Mekem yumi nogat
Janis blong mekem ol wok.*

*Ol woman (ol woman) raon Vanuatu (raon Vanuatu)
Ol woman raon Vanuatu oli stap hadwok
Mekem wok long ol aelan, mekem wok long evri' hom
Blong daonem ol rabis fasin we istap spoelem yumi.*

This song was composed by Chief Bong of Lonhali CAVAW, North Ambrym, during the National CAVAW training in 2002, held at Dumbea Hall in Port Vila



Participants and VWC facilitators at the North Ambae workshop which resulted in the re-establishment of the North Ambae CAVAW in July 2022; like all 4 CAVAWs on Ambae, the previous N Ambae CAVAW was unable to continue its work due to the upheaval and displacement of the volcano eruptions in 2017 and 2018.

Charlotte Wai: La violence contre les femmes

Centre des femmes Vanuataises, je t'estime beaucoup
 Et je suis fier de toi
 Ta presence me soutienne beaucoup et
 me donne le sens de pouvoir continuer la vie
 Entant que femmes locaux et étrangères,
 Des races différentes, parlant de différentes langues,
 Pratiquant différentes cultures, et différentes religions
 J'apprécie ton milieu de travail,
 Lieu de défenses et de secours
 Centre des femmes Vanuataises!
 Tu m'inspire comme étant
 Mes parents biologiques
 Malgré les phases douloureuses dans la vie,
 Considère comme une moins que rien, sans valeurs, sans défenses
 Aux yeux de mieux placés
 Mais ta presence me rassure
 Et me redonne l'espoir
 A franchir un autre stade de vie
 Plus meilleur qu'avant.
 Oh femmes blessés! Oh jeune filles Vanuataise! N'abandonnez pas ce Centre
 Venez! Venez!
 Le Centre des Femmes Vanuataise
 Et un lieu sûr très déterminé pour se réfugier
 aujourd'hui, demain et au futur.



Iaken Ampen: Men, it is our responsibility

Vanuatu has not created enough avenues for women to come forward and share their concerns. Many women within society have issues, but there are not many avenues for them to share what they are facing at home. Vanuatu really needs VWC for women to bring their complaints forward and to be addressed. It was very important to create an organisation such as this, to allow women to come forward, because it plays an important role for women whom are victims of domestic violence to understand all the different forms of domestic violence and to report it.

Since VWC was established and has continued to advocate with its program, today we can see more and more women coming forward and reporting crimes they faced, both to VWC and also to the Vanuatu Police Force.

Violence is not only affecting women but also men and children. Vanuatu needs to accept this, and the Government must also accept VWC to address these issues.

Men are perpetrators of violence against women. It is the culture that we men learned and inherited from generation to generation. The culture of violence doesn't do any good to mothers and sisters as human beings. Women and girls should be treated as fairly as men. They deserve equal treatment as their human right.

Men, it is our responsibility to create harmonious relationships, and to achieve a level playing field for strong and united family bonds.

Violence against women is everybody's business. A home without violence forms a good foundation for strong family reunions. To address the issue, every family must not accept and use violence.

Take your stand and say NO to violence against women and create harmonious relationship for healthy family, healthy community, healthy society and healthy Vanuatu.

LONG LIVE MALE ADVOCACY LONG LIVE WOMEN OF VANUATU.



Chief Inspector Iaken Ampen, Acting Director of the Police College, Vanuatu Police Force and long-standing male advocate for women's human rights

"Vanuatu really needs VWC for women to bring their complaints forward and to be addressed."

"Violence is not only affecting women but also men and children. Vanuatu needs to accept this ...

Take your stand and say NO to violence against women and create harmonious relationship for healthy family, healthy community, healthy society and healthy Vanuatu."

Sharon Frank: A place of refuge

*I felt fear I felt afraid
I had all these thoughts
But no help or aid*

*VWC was whispered to my ear
I had to come and see
I had to come, I had to hear*

*Thoughts were going through my mind
Should I stay or should I go
Gossipers talked behind my back, like snakes
about to attack*

*The moment I waked in
The smiles that greeted me
The pain I felt slowly slipped away
I felt at ease I felt free*

*From questions to conversations
From tears to reassurance
The help that was given
Was beyond my expectation*

*VWC is a place for refuge
A place of peace
A place of help
And a place for you and me*



Sharon Frank is Research Officer with the Vanuatu Women's Centre

Anna Harry: Emi wan bigfala work

Since mi kam wok long VWC for 17 months, mi just luk importance lo work mo position we mi holem. Mi luk se fulap ol woman mo ol gel oli facem vaelens lo home blong olgeta.

Client Support Fund ya now emi playem important part blong victim emi save kasem wanem nao emi stap kam from.

Personally, mi come blong realisem, and have small understanding of Gender, Human Rights, violence against women and domestic violence. And I come to understand / recognisem signs of violence lo wan community, society mo family blo mi o related family.

Mi luk save se evri staff blong VWC mo wok blong evri section inside emi link nomo. mo evri wok we VWC staff/organisation emi wan important wok mo emi wan bigfala wok we yumi stap karemaot evri dei.

Ol wok we VWC i stap mekem emi save helpem mi blong save ol rights blong mi wetem ol responsibiliti. Bae emi no easy blong yumi save changem mentality blong wan man/boy blong acceptem Gender, but mi bilif lo me wan se "I can do it". As long as I have the knowlege and get every possible information so that mi save deal wetem ol issue we emi happen lo family blo mi. Mi save teachim ol pikinini blo mi mo too future husband blo mi.

Wok we VWC emi stap mekem emi motivatem mi like olsem mi wantem blong mi go bak lo community blo mi blo givim aot more awareness.



Anna Harry is the Accounts Administrator with the Vanuatu Women's Centre

"Bae emi no easy blong yumi save changem mentality blong wan man/boy blong acceptem Gender, but mi bilif lo me wan se "I can do it""

Andrew Bob: We look forward to working with VWC in future

I am currently working at ADRA Vanuatu (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) as the Rehabilitation Coordinator in the Blossom Program. The Blossom program addresses Family Life Education especially on issues of domestic violence.

VWC is our main stakeholder. ADRA Blossom staff and volunteers benefited from Gender Based Violence and Male Advocate trainings provided by the VWC. VWC invited ADRA Blossom to join the 8th Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women meeting held in Nadi in Fiji in December 2018. VWC support to our program is greatly appreciated. We look forward to working together with VWC in the future.

Pastor Andrew Bob is a long-standing male advocate who now works with ADRA



Noella Okis: Her poem

A new role for you in life
 A new role is start of a new way
 Where things would be new to me
 But you will surely find success
 Your hard work has a big role to play
 In our country and province or community

Being confident in way and through
 Vanuatu Women Centre is where
 Women can share violence
 That happened in their life
 Is where we find justice?

Take this as a positive life
 To achieve what you truly want to
 Wish you all the good luck from my side.

Vanuatu Women Centre
 You are so great to us
 You help me understand my human right
 And know the difference between domestic
 violence
 And violence against all women

 Looking forward for your future!!



Noella Okis is a Counsellor with the Tafea
 Counselling Centre

Viran Molisa: Nurturing, solidarity, empathy and unity among women

I started work at the Sanma Counselling Centre (SCC) on the 7th January 2013 as a Volunteer and then on May 10th 2013 I was employed as SCC's third Counsellor. Then for 2 years (2017 – 2018) I was promoted to the position of Project Officer for the Tafea Counselling Centre. In 2019 I was promoted to another position at VWC in Port Vila as the Counsellor Manager (1 year) in 2020 I requested to go back to Sanma Counselling Centre to work as the Community Educator / Counsellor due to my children's situation. That is where I am currently working today.



Viran Molisa began as a Volunteer with the Sanma Counselling Centre, then became SCC's Counsellor, the Project Officer for Tafea Counselling Centre, then VWC Counsellor Manager, and now works as Community Educator/Counsellor with SCC

The most important moment in my life as a VWC staff is when I first came to run a 5-day workshop, observed by my Project Officer at SCC. It is so important to me, because I have always admired my Project Officer and the previous Community Educator who facilitated 5-day workshops on Gender, Domestic Violence and Human Rights. It really inspires and motivates me to be doing that too. Now I am confident to be doing it front of my Project Officer while she is observing me. It meant a lot to me because it is like a dream come true. For me personally, I feel that it's a gift given to me by VWC to be an expert in facilitating these workshops.

The biggest challenge I faced was when I had to separate from my partner of 9 years due to domestic violence. We had two kids together. It was the greatest challenge of all to let go of my feelings and love for him. I have come to realise, with the help of VWC, that I can't tolerate living in a cycle of domestic violence anymore and I have had enough. So with all the support, empowerment, motivation and inspiration of VWC, I finally overcame the greatest challenge of my life. Now, being a single mother for 5 years, now I am happy and confident with life, and my kids are happy, and I feel that I regret nothing.

"I recommend the Vanuatu Government should allocate a special budget for VWC because VWC is trying to stop domestic violence and all forms of discrimination against every woman, girl, boy and future generations of the Republic of Vanuatu"

VWC meant the world to me personally. I didn't find this job, but this job finds me. First, I thought I'm blessed to have a job to get that financial support, but as the years slowly go by, I started to unravel great knowledge on law and about women's issues, and how to deal with the issues. Also, I am seeing life in a more constructive way than ever before, and I started to fall in love more and more with my job. Attending trainings and workshops has educated me a lot in dealing with women's issues more effectively because I was also a survivor and that's what motivates me more to

help victims effectively. My passion for this job is so great. The working environment is just so great where there is nurturing, solidarity, empathy and unity among women.

VWC is the one and only organisation in Vanuatu that provides counselling with the human rights perspectives. It has helped many women, girls, boys and children around Vanuatu since it began in 1992, but it is still funded by a foreign government, and not the Vanuatu Government. So I recommend that if the Vanuatu Government could see its importance it should try to allocate a special budget for this organisation (VWC) in its Ministry of Justice, because VWC is trying to stop domestic violence and all forms of discrimination against every woman, girl, boy and future generations of the Republic of Vanuatu.

Viran Molisa: VWC

*VWC empowers me when I was weak.
 VWC motivates me when I felt useless.
 VWC encourages me when I was discouraged.
 VWC inspires me when I was underestimated.
 VWC strengthens me when I felt that I can't go on.
 VWC educates me when I was neglected.
 VWC gives me hope when I'm hopeless.
 VWC sees me as an individual, as a woman, as a human being
 and believes in me
 when the whole world turns against me, turns me down,
 blames me and judges me.
 There is no other place on this entire planet as VWC that sees the real me
 as a woman and as a Human Being.
 VWC is my Superhero, my mentor and my safe Haven.*



Viran Molisa during a rural community awareness visit in Tafea province when she was TCC Project Officer, with long-term male advocate Police officer Mackenzie Temata, and former TCC Counsellor Beatrice Yapus

Maryline George: VWC's future needs to serve the women of Vanuatu

Vanuatu Women Centre is a place where survivors of domestic violence can go to for safe refuge and access free service in terms of counselling and access to justice.

Over the years VWC has developed in terms of establishing CAVAWS, male advocates in communities to assist in advocating for women's human rights, lawyers to assist clients to courts which is free of charge, humanitarian officers to assist communities facing natural disasters, and police liaison officers to assist clients in following up criminal cases with police which have been prolonged and sometimes misplaced by police officers.



Maryline George joined VWC staff in 2018 as Police Liaison Officer; she has ensured that serious criminal cases of violence against women and children are dealt with by the Police

Trainings on Gender and Human Rights have been delivered to communities and especially to other stakeholders such as Health, Justice and Police. Already VWC have seen and witnessed these stakeholders putting their hands together and ensuring that the survivors of domestic violence are taken and served as priorities: that is by issuing of Family Protection Orders by the Magistrate Courts, service of Family Protection Orders (FPOs), conducting investigations of domestic violence cases by Police, and examination of physical abuse and sexual assaults by the Doctors or Health Officers.

The Vanuatu Government needs to assist VWC in terms of funding as it is the ONLY local NGO which identifies the issues faced by women, girls and boys under the age of 18 years and has offered free services to assist the survivors. There is a need for VWC to have a safe house of its own, fully fenced around as security instead of accommodating the survivors in various places for safety reasons.

It is also essential for VWC to have a one stop shop that is having their own medical practitioners, police officers and lawyers.

As we see more and more survivors coming in to VWC and other branches to access the free services provided, it is really important to increase the number of staff in VWC and its branches.

My name is Maryline George. I am an ex-Police Officer and I was recruited into the workforce of VWC as a Police Liaison Officer. Since August 2018 to date, when I was recruited, I have dealt with 162 criminal cases which have been reported to the police. I love my job and I will always be available to assist anyone who needs my assistance.

Finally, I want to salute the most courageous woman who struggled through storm and rainy seasons, facing financial constraints, having sleepless nights but she never gave up since September 1992 to have this centre set up to where it is now. **"BRAVO MRS MERILYN TAHI"**

Salmoe Leodoro: The tree

*The tree that started as a seed.
It grew up so fast.
It spreads its branches to women, men and
children around Vanuatu.*

*The tree that stands up strong
for women and children.
It stands strong and firm
during the storms.
It protects the lives and homes of women, men
and children.*

*The tree that supports and feeds its branches,
blossoms and bears fruits in the lives of women,
men and children.*

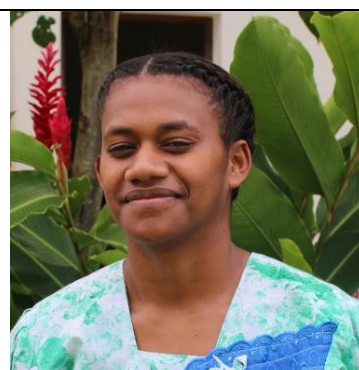
*The significant tree of life.
Watered, cherished, and loved.
The tree of Vanuatu women,
men and children.*



*Salome Leodoro is a Counsellor with the Penama
Counselling Centre*

Joyline Kenneth: Domestic Violence

*Stop telling yourself you can fix him.
He's been this way for a long time,
Long time and he doesn't intend to change.
Don't be a sacrificial lamb on the altar of his rage.
Don't play the martyr to his hate.
You can never save someone by letting them destroy you.
That's not love, it's relational suicide.
Save yourself instead.
Get out while there's still time.*



*Joyline Kenneth is Office Assistant
for the Vanuatu Women's Centre*

Miriam Bule: Be seen but not heard

*Be seen but not heard
In the homes,
In the nakamals,
On the streets,
Everywhere.*

Be faithful to carry out domestic chores.

*Clean the house,
Do the laundry,
Cook meals.
Nurture the children,
Bathe and feed them,
See them off to school,
Put them to bed.*

Participate in customary ceremonies.

*Staying up late at night
Weaving traditional mats for use
In traditional ceremonies.
Plant and take care of the gardens
Produce will be used
Domestically,
Traditionally,
Commercially.*

Participate in religious ceremonies

*Clean the church in preparation for worship,
Do catering for church activities and ceremonies,
But no vacancy available for leadership roles for you*



*Miriam Bule is VWC
Counsellor Supervisor*

Be respectful towards

*A husband,
An uncle,
A brother,
Nephew,
In-laws.*

Be a servant

Respect him for who he is

*A father to your children and husband to you.
Wait on him when he comes home late from socializing,
Serve him meals and retire for the night together,
Continue to bear children until the preferred sex comes along.
Understand that VIOLENCE is part of marriage,
And will reduce as you grow older and wiser in the marriage.*

Vanuatu needs VWC,

*To advocate against violence against women, girls and children,
To be a voice for the unheard and unseen,
Facing domestic violence and numerous immoralities
That hinders their chances to progress in life.
Suffering in silence every day,
No chances to enjoy inner and external peace.*

*To lobby for law reform that will provide
Maximum protection for victims/survivors
Of domestic violence.*

*To re-educate the minds of all ni-Vanuatu
So, a consensus can be achieved
To eliminate violence against women, girls and children
In Vanuatu.*

Anne Marie Simeon: Organisation ia i helpem plenty mama

Story blong mi olsem Humanitarian. Vanuatu Women's Centre hemi one organisation we hemi unique, we fonder blong hem i one woman Vanuatu, name Mrs Merlyn Tahi. Organisation ia i born long 2nd September 1992. Aim blong hem i blong stoppem ol rabbis fasin againstem ol woman, ol pikinini girl wetem ol boy under 18 years. Organisation ia i stap helpem ol man blong givimaot information, time ol i come long Centre blong askem information.

Organisation ia i helpem plenty mama, wetem pikinini we oli no save right blong olgeta, olsem:

- Oli no save basic Law
- Oli no save procedure blong work
- Oli no save process blong go long court
- Oli no save wanem blong makem
- Oli no save who bae i helpem olgeta, now oli come long Vanuatu Women's Centre.



Anne-Marie Simeon is Humanitarian Officer with the Vanuatu Women's Centre

Organisation ia i helpem ol staff blong oli save gat work. Ol staff ia majority blong olgeta oli ol survivors blong domestic violence. Now ia plenty mama i stap come mo save right blong olgeta tru long: counselling, ol workshop, ol awareness, public tok mo training tru long ol staff, ol CAVAW wetem male advocate we oli stap long ol community blong yumi tru aot long ol Islands blong yumi, mo ol branches blong VWC we i branches aot i go long ol provinces blong yumi.

Organisation ia i help big one inside long Vanuatu, olsem helpem ol Police long ol cases blong olgeta, especially long saed blong apply from family orders, wetem child maintenance. Hemi one organisation we i help plenty long saed blong counselling, apply from ol orders long Court, tekem ol victims i go long Police Station, mo hospital, sipose client i no gat money VWC bae i help blong pem medical report or birth certificate blong hem sipose hemi apply from child maintenance tru long client support fund. Organisation ia i help tu long ol big event long Vanuatu olsem Children's Day, go celebrate long ol school long community round long ol provinces blong yumi mo celebratem days blong ol women.

161 Free Line i helpem ol mama we oli no gat money, oli save ring i come free long office or long ol counsellor I save helpem olgeta tru long phone – TVL or Digicel.

Now ia office i expand from staff i increase, tru long big achievement blong VWC. Olsem VWC i recruitem more staff olsem : Police Liaison Officer, Communication Officer, Humanitarian Officer, one permanent driver, two Finance Officer mo one Lawyer. Sponsor hemi DFAT, UN WOMEN, OXFAM oli stap sponserem office ia follem big falla work we oli stap mekem.

Long 2nd September 2022 bae organisation ia bae i kasem 30 years blong hem long services we hemi mekem tru aot long Vanuatu. Felicitation Mrs Tahi Merlyn long hard work. Australia, New Zealand wetem France Government i recognise yu wetem ol people long Nation ia Vanuatu. Thank you tumas.

Genista M Twomey: Women's rights

*Women from all Human races
Should be Embraced,
for their Uniqueness
That is the Quality
that Importance them*

*Women from different Backgrounds
Should be Empowered
with their Rights
That is their Security
that Protects them*

*Women from different Islands
Should be Educated
That is their Road
to a Bright Future*

*Women from different Societies
Should be Praised for
what they've done
That is their Talent
that keeps them going*

*Women scattered all around the World
Must be Respected for Who they are
That is their Dignity
that No one can take away.*



*Genista Twomey is the Finance/Administration Assistant
at Vanuatu Women's Centre*

Lisa Ishmael Laban: It is time to have a happy life

I watch him pull her hair
He slaps her face
He kicks her on the floor

She loves him so much
So she doesn't have the strength
To walk right out the door

There's blood on her face
Everything hurts
And all she can do is cry

She made him mad
So this is what he does
She wish she knew his reason why

Her heart won't let her leave him
And it hurts too much to try

She wonder if this is how her life will be
From now until she dies

He says he's sorry
He takes her in his arms
He even starts to cry

She tells him she forgives him
And that everything is fine

But then he continued on doing it
So, she decided to make him leave the house
It is time for her to have a better and happy life

Kathleen Mabon Bani: Vanuatu Women's Centre

A girl worker

*You educate me
You nurtured me
You empowered me
You equipped me to be courageous
You promote me from one level to another
Oh Vanuatu Women Centre, I embrace you*

A grown-up woman worker

*You were with me even when my mother was not around
You clothe me, fed me and provided my basic needs
You taught me my Human Rights
When I stumble and fall, you lift me up
You guide me through even when violence attacked me
I would be lost without you
Oh Vanuatu Women's Centre, I embrace you.*

Your legacy

*I am marvelled at your service
I am one of your product in your service
I inherit your blessings through knowledge & skills
I am enjoying your legacy
My future generations will continue to reap the harvest of your hard work
Oh Vanuatu Women's Centre, I embrace you.*



*Lisa Ishmael Laban is the VWC Program Manager
(author of the poem at left)*



*Kathleen Mabon Bani is the SCC Project Officer (author of
the poem above)*

Juliet Hunt: Working with VWC was a huge privilege

In 1999, I was asked by AusAID to facilitate a program design workshop with the Vanuatu Women's Centre to develop their first multi-year program to be funded by the Australian Government Aid Program. At that stage, I had already been working as an independent gender equality consultant for about 8 years, and as monitoring, evaluation, strategic planning and risk management advisor with the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, so I knew a little about VWC through FWCC and particularly through the Beneath Paradise project (see End Note viii). Shamima Ali, FWCC's Coordinator, also attended the program design workshop, along with VWC and SCC branch staff, and some key local stakeholders in Vanuatu.



Juliet Hunt was a consultant to VWC

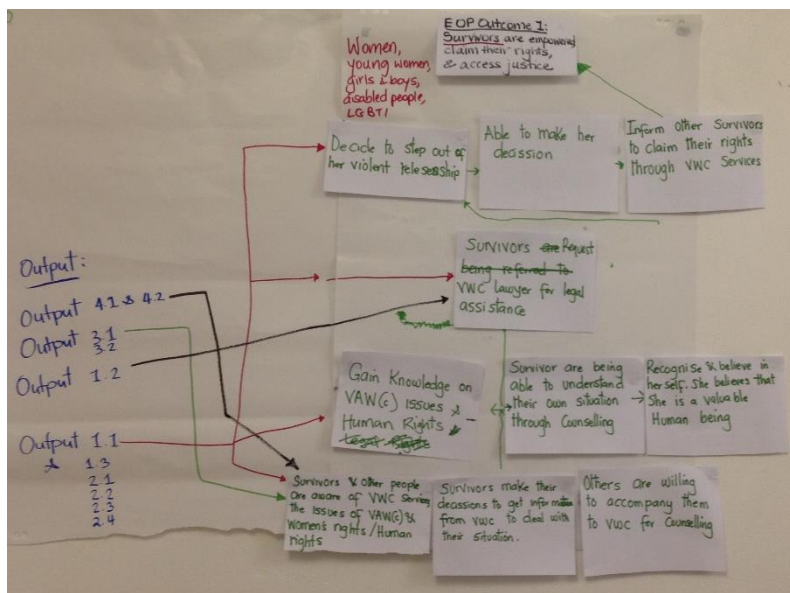
When I first began working in the overseas aid and development sector in the late 1970s, I had a firm belief that local actors and civil society are absolutely critical to the success of any development efforts. Indeed, this seemed self-evident, as did the essential importance of local ownership of goal-setting, design and implementation – in fact, all parts of the development process. As the years have gone by, my belief has been repeatedly reinforced by evidence in the field, as I have evaluated many different programs and projects in several countries and regions. I also approached my work with a strong commitment to gender equality and equal human and legal rights. I think these foundational commitments made me a good fit to work as a consultant with these women's rights movements over the decades. I always saw my first accountability as being to them. I was honest when I didn't agree with something they proposed – sometimes brutally so – but somehow, they forgave my foreign brashness. And to this day, I believe that a good friend is first and foremost an honest one.

So what was my role? It was extremely minor! I had the benefit of already having worked in the development sector for about two decades before I began the design process with VWC, and most of this work had focused on advancing gender equality and women's rights in overseas development. I facilitated, listened, documented VWC's achievements and their learning, asked a lot of obvious and probably silly questions and some difficult ones, and learned a lot through this process. I "translated" the enormous achievements of VWC into the jargon that I hoped donors could understand. I strived hard to make the donor-imposed processes owned and valued by VWC staff for their own sake: our planning and monitoring workshops were always participatory, reflective, and honest about the challenges, achievements, what had not worked, and the most effective strategies. People from all levels of the organisation told their stories and gave their perspectives. I hope they also had some fun, and we certainly had quite a bit of cake and chocolate that helped to keep our brains working through long hours of discussion.

This reflective and participatory process was very much in tune with Marilyn's own natural approach and strategy – to bring as many staff along the journey of understanding the bigger picture of what works to end violence against women and children, how to reach the outputs and outcomes, and understand how we got there. The program design documents and annual plans were "living" documents, and everyone usually turned up at the workshops with their copies in hand, or open on the table, ready to say what activities had been done, and if not, why not – and ready to tell everyone about the most significant changes that they thought had occurred in the previous six months. It was a huge privilege for me to work alongside all the dedicated and hard-working people who have contributed to this book, and many others who are listed in Annex 3.

In chapter 1, Marilyn has already spoken at length about the importance of FWCC and the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women (the "Regional Network") to the development of VWC over the years. This strong regional women's rights network was an important initiative of FWCC; it provided significant support, solidarity and capacity building to all the women's rights movements in the Pacific, and it gave opportunities to key gifted leaders like Marilyn Tahi and others to play a role as equal sisters in helping, supporting and training others. From my parallel work with FWCC, I also observed that the thoughtful and considered experience of VWC staff contributed greatly to the positive functioning of the Regional Network.

Readers can find so many important lessons in the pages above about how this organisation has grown and developed, from all the poems and stories by individual contributors. Marilyn and so many of her senior staff at VWC and the branches have made a consistent and deliberate effort to develop the capacity of their staff – often, these were women who had very few opportunities for education or advancement, and some were living with violence and oppression. VWC saw their potential, and gave them space to develop their own road in life.



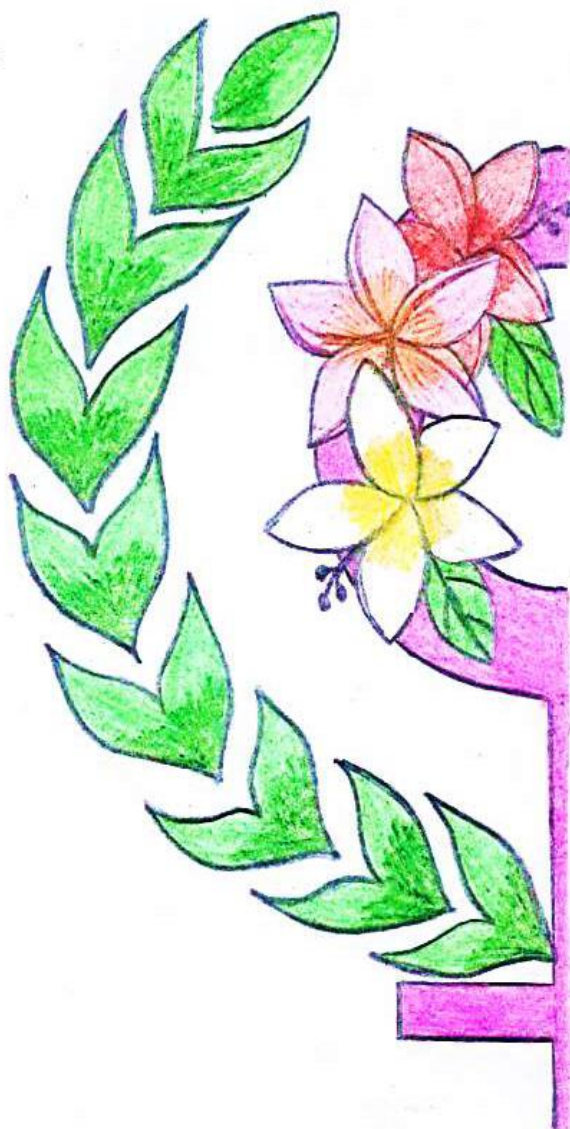
One of four pathways of change developed by participants in small group work during the 2016 participatory program design workshop, showing links to design outputs and outcomes

The same is true of VWC's non-judgemental approach to clients. VWC learns daily from the experiences of clients, and this continues to inform their advocacy and prevention strategies. I have witnessed many horrendous stories of abuse and torture – but I have heard many more of women liberating themselves from violence and discrimination, often with the support of key male leaders who VWC has trained and re-trained over many years, or with the support of previous clients.

As an expatriate, it is not my role to say why Vanuatu needs VWC. Other have said it so eloquently in poetry and narrative. However, I do know that eliminating violence against women and claiming women's and girls' equal rights is still a work in progress in all countries of the world, and that it requires generational change – where young boys and girls grow up learning a different way. There is strong evidence that local, independent civil society women's organisations have been crucial to the progress made across the globe to date. I believe that local women's movements are also the key to making further progress toward equality and non-violence, and to consolidating change within families and communities.

Thank you, Vanuatu Women's Centre, for the opportunity to work alongside you over the last twenty-three years.

Leikita Kalorib: Vanuatu Women's Centre



Vanuatu Women's Centre

For Women
By Women
Breaking the
Silence
Men & Women
Empowering
Women
Facilitating
behavioural
change
Transforming
social
norms
Educating a
nation
End Violence
Against Women
& Children



*Leikita Kalorib is a former
VWC Research Officer*

VWC CAVAW song: Mama

*God ikrietem yumi ol papa mo mama
Ol yangfala mo ol pikinini too
Evriwan ispesel evriwan isemak
Mama hemi gat bigfala wok long home tede.*

*Yumi tankem God blong provaedem gud mama
Yumi tankem God from gud wok blong mama
Tingting gud mo wantem
Blong helpem gud mama
Mama hemi strong holder
Blong laef long wol tede.*

*Fulap taem ol papa ting nating long mama
Ting nating long ol spesel role blong olgeta
Klinim haos, kukum kakae, fidim pikinini
Wasem klos blong family mo
Satisfaem hom.*

This song was composed by Chief Bong of Lonhali CAVAW, North Ambrym, during the National CAVAW training in 2002, held at Dumbea Hall in Port Vila



Port Vila Town Council of Chiefs participate in a VWC training in October 2021, pictured with VWC staff: Counselling Supervisor and Coordinator (far left), and Humanitarian Relief Officer and Research Officer (far right)

Annex 1: Acronyms and Glossary

AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development, formerly the Australian Government agency tasked with delivery of the Australia's official aid program
Beneath Paradise	A documentation project with Pacific women to prepare for the NGO Forum that ran parallel to the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women (see End Note viii)
CAVAW	Committee Against Violence Against Women, rural committees established by VWC throughout Vanuatu to provide prevention and response services on EVAW
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRP	Comprehensive Reform Program of the Vanuatu Government
CSO	Civil society organisation
CSW	United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
DFAT	Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which now delivers Australia's official aid program
DV	Domestic violence
EVAW	Elimination of Violence Against Women
EVAWC	Elimination of Violence Against Women
FPA	Family Protection Act of the Vanuatu Government
FPO	Family Protection Order, issued under the Family Protection Act
FWCC	Fiji Women's Crisis Centre
INGOs	International donor non-government agencies
IWDA	International Women's Development Agency
MCC	MALAMPA Counselling Centre, a provincial branch of VWC
<i>nakamal</i>	A traditional meeting place, used for community gatherings, custom court proceedings and community ceremonies, presided over by Chiefs
<i>nasara</i>	A small customary payment to a Chief for permission to conduct work in the village
NGOs	Non-government organisations
NZ	New Zealand
NZAID	New Zealand Agency for International Development, formerly the NZ Government agency tasked with delivery of the NZ's official aid program, now administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT)
PDD	Program Design Document of VWC
PECC	PENAMA Counselling Centre, a provincial branch of VWC
PWNAVAW	Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women, which has FWCC as its Secretariat
SCC	SANMA Counselling Centre, a provincial branch of VWC
TCC	TAFEA Counselling Centre, a provincial branch of VWC
TOCC	TORBA Counselling Centre, a provincial branch of VWC
VANGO	Vanuatu Association of NGOs
VAW	Violence against women
VAWC	Violence against women and children
VNCW	Vanuatu National Council of Women
VNSO	Vanuatu National Statistics Office
VPF	Vanuatu Police Force
VMF	Vanuatu Mobile Force
VWC	Vanuatu Women's Centre , used in this book to refer to the Port Vila centre, the 5 branches, and the rural national network of CAVAWs and trained male advocates

Annex 2: VWC Trustees

Pastor John Liu	2020/2001 – current
Grace Molisa	2020/2001 – 2002
Hanson Matas	2020/2001 – 2010
Moses Stephens	2002 – 2010, 2012 – current
Nadine Alatoa	2002 – 2003
Jocelyn Mete	2009 – 2017
Myriam Abel	2013 – current

Note: VWC's management committee includes the trustees, VWC senior staff, and Project Officers from each of the Branches.

Annex 3: VWC staff and advisors

Name	Role	Time engaged
Staff mainly based at the Vanuatu Women's Centre in Port Vila		
Meryllyn Tahi	Co-founder/Volunteer in the early days, Coordinator	1992 – 2021
	Technical Advisor	2021 – current
Elizabeth Mermer	Co-founder/Volunteer in the early days, Counsellor	1992 – 1994
Maie Biagk	Volunteer, Counsellor and Senior Counsellor	1993 – 2006
Lily Natu Tawari	Safehouse Counsellor, VWC Counsellor	1995 – 2013
	TCC Counsellor	2013 – 2014
Louise Nauka	Counsellor	1996 – 2007
Rolengas Lolo	Finance and Administration Officer	1998 – 2001
	Penama Counselling Centre Project Officer	2017 – current
Linda Solomon	Office Assistant	1999 – 2002
Janet Pakoa Kaluat	Counsellor, Mobile Counsellor	2000 – 2002
Miriam Bule	Community Educator	2000 – 2004
	Counsellor	2014 – 2018
	Community Educator	2018 – 2019
	Counsellor Manager, Counsellor Supervisor	2019 – current
Julie Bule	Finance and Administration Officer	2001 – 2002
Linda Gibson	Office Assistant	2002 – 2003
	Volunteer	2005 – 2006
Samantha Garae	Finance and Administration Officer	2002 – 2010
Meldrid Evon	Cleaner	2002 – 2008
Lynffer Wini Maltungtung	Lawyer	2003 – 2005
Agathe Malsungai	Lawyer	2005 – 2008
Tatavola Matas	Volunteer, Office Assistant	2003 – 2005
	Lawyer (Deputy Coordinator from 2014)	2010 – 2021
	Coordinator	2021 – current
Christine Keasi	Volunteer, Mobile Counsellor (from 2003)	2002 – 2019
	TCC Counsellor	2020 – current
Marie Shem	Counsellor Trainer	2003 – 2008
Rotina Mackency	Community Educator	2004 – 2005
Madlen Saraken	Volunteer	2004 – 2005
Serah Ligo	Community Educator	2005 – 2007
Ruth Yawoi	Volunteer, Office Assistant, Counsellor (2007)	2005 – 2011

Name	Role	Time engaged
Judy Narai	Counsellor	2006 – 2007
Elina Karten	Volunteer	2006 – 2007
Naeline Saraken	Volunteer	2007
Sonia Wasi	Deputy Coordinator	2007 – 2013
Juliet Buleko	Cleaner Office Assistant, Counsellor (from 2012)	2008 – 2009 2011 – current
Melanie Tari	Volunteer	2008 – 2009
Loviana Arusiro	Volunteer	2008 – 2009
Lynne Rose Tule	Counsellor CAVAW Officer Counsellor Supervisor Community Educator	2008 – 2013 2014 – 2017 2017 – 2018 2021 – current
Bertha Misseve	Community Educator	2009 – 2014
Tounga Ben	Cleaner	2010 – 2013
Lisa Ishmael Laban	Office Assistant, Finance/Admin Officer Finance/Office Manager Program Manager	2010 – 2013 2014 – 2020 2020 – current
Leikita Kalorib	Research Officer, Research/Branch Officer	2013 – 2020
Serah Garae	Counsellor	2013 – 2022
Charlotte Wai	Counsellor	2014 – current
Lily Binihi	Cleaner	2013 – current
Kerry Natou	Gardener	2013 – current
Stephanie Haruel	Community Educator	2015 – 2016
Jelinda Toa	Lawyer 2	2015 – 2016
Benjamin Matan	Volunteer	2015
Jenny Rose Garae	Volunteer	2014 – 2016
Latanya Bice	Volunteer Counsellor	2013 – 2017 2020 – current
Sharline Sarai	Volunteer, Finance/Administration Assistant Counsellor Trainee, Counsellor CAVAW Officer	2013– 2016 2017 – 2020 2020 – current
Annety Rose	Volunteer	2014 – 2015
Wendy Daniel	Volunteer	2015 – 2016
Harina Binihi	Volunteer	2016
Sandria Worer	Volunteer	2015 - 2016
Maeva Tahi	Volunteer	2016
Jill Makikon	Volunteer, Community Educator	2016 – 2018
Trisha Leodoro	Volunteer, Office Assistant Counsellor	2016 – 2018 2019 – current
Genista Twomey	Office Assistant Finance/Administration Assistant	2016 2017 – current
Margret Tekak	Lawyer 2	2017 – current
Eva Barang	Volunteer	2016 – 2017
Joyline Kenneth	Volunteer, Office Assistant (from 2019)	2017 – current
Maryline George	Police Liaison Officer	2018 – current
Dorah Esau	CAVAW Officer	2019
Anne-Marie Simeon	Humanitarian Officer	2019 – current
Heather Votu	Volunteer	2019 – 2021
Olline Reuben	Community Educator	2020

Name	Role	Time engaged
Shirley Vira	Research/Branch Officer	2020
Sharon Frank	Digital Communications Officer Research/Branch Officer	2020 2020 – current
Antony Ishmael	Volunteer Gardener	2019 – 2022
Tasike Tathy	Driver	2020 – current
Leimara Alicia Kalorib	Counsellor	2020 - current
Anna Harry	Accounts Administrator	2020 - current
Anastashia Kalsakau	Digital Communications Officer	2021 – current
Sophia Melteburi	Volunteer	2021
Staff mainly based at Sanma Counselling Centre		
Kathleen Mabon Bani	SCC Finance, Counsellor, Community Educator SCC Project Officer	1995 – 2001 2001 – current
Annie Philemon	SCC Project Officer SCC Counsellor / Community Educator	1995 – 2001 2001 – 2012
Carol Martin	SCC Office Assistant SCC Counsellor / Community Educator	1995 – 1996 1997 – 2003
Veantzala Sale	SCC Office Assistant	1998 – 2001
Emmie Garae	SCC Volunteer, Counsellor	2002 – 2005
Fridah Butu	SCC Volunteer, Office Assistant SCC Counsellor VWC Counsellor Supervisor	2004 – 2005 2005 – 2012 2013 – 2016
Shanna Ligo	VWC Volunteer SCC Volunteer SCC Counsellor/Community Educator	2004 – 2006 2008 – 2009 2010 - 2018
Lolette Worwor	SCC Counsellor	2005 – 2008
Nadia Eric	SCC Office Assistant SCC Counsellor	2005 2011 – 2017
Hermine Laga	SCC Volunteer	2007 – 2008
Nancy Rose	SCC Office Assistant, Counsellor (2010)	2008 – 2010
Rocinta Vora	SCC Volunteer and Counsellor	2009 – 2010
Lilonto Enid	SCC Volunteer	2011 – 2012
Viran Molisa	SCC Office Assistant, Counsellor (from 2013) TCC Project Officer VWC Counsellor Manager SCC Community Educator/Counsellor	2013 – 2016 2017 – 2018 2019 2020 – current
Melica Vocor	SCC Office Assistant SCC Counsellor	2013 2014 – 2018
Davina Buleuru	SCC Office Assistant	2013 – 2015
Edwina George	SCC Volunteer (2015), Office Assistant SCC Counsellor	2015 – 2017 2017 – current
Eltini Pakoa	SCC Volunteer, Counsellor	2015 – 2016
Leila Edward	SCC Volunteer, Office Assistant	2017 – 2018
Delvin Iatika	SCC Volunteer	2017
Vinnia Tohkvanu	SCC Volunteer, Office Assistant SCC Counsellor	2017 – 2018 2019 – current
Aicha Tevigogon	SCC Volunteer (2019), Office Assistant	2019 – current
Veruta Kalo	SCC Volunteer, Counsellor (from 2020)	2019 – current
Rachel Jerry	Volunteer, Office Assistant (from 2022)	2020 – current
Jerineth Perei	Volunteer	2020 – 2021

Name	Role	Time engaged
Staff mainly based at the Tafea Counselling Centre		
Kaloka Wilfred	TCC Project Officer	2004 – 2012
Lotty Kayai	TCC Counsellor	2004 – 2010
Beverly Peters	TCC Office Assistant	2005 – 2006
Beatrice Yapus	TCC Office Assistant VWC Volunteer TCC Counsellor	2006 – 2010 2011 – 2014 2014 – 2019
Mary Johnny	TCC Counsellor	2007 – 2010
Lisa Thomas	TCC Counsellor TCC Project Officer	2009 – 2012 2012 – 2015
Isabel Iavisi	TCC Counsellor	2010 – 2013
Priscilla Kausiama	TCC Office Assistant TCC Counsellor	2010 – 2015 2015 – 2019
Annie Nok	TCC Volunteer	2010 – 2011
Dorothy Johnson	TCC Volunteer TCC Counsellor	2011 – 2012 2012 – 2013
Dorinda Uguna	TCC Project Officer	2015 – 2016
Beatrice Yapus	VWC Volunteer TCC Counsellor	2012 – 2014 2014 – 2019
Dorothy Johnson	TCC Counsellor	2012 – 2013
Isabel Iavisi	TCC Counsellor	2012 – 2013
Julie Loughman	TCC Volunteer	2012 – 2013
Priscilla Kausiama	TCC Office Assistant TCC Counsellor	2012 – 2015 2015 – 2019
Lillian Taseru	TCC Volunteer TCC Office Assistant	2014 – 2015 2015 – 2019
Rita Whyte	TCC Volunteer	2014 – 2017
Noelline Yawa	TCC Volunteer	2015 – 2016
Prescilla Nalau	TCC Volunteer	2017
Ruth Iavilu Naliu	TCC Volunteer TCC Counsellor, Project Officer	2017 – 2019 2020 – current
Bastiana Kota	TCC Volunteer, Office Assistant (from 2020)	2018 – current
Jennifer Manua	TCC Project Officer	2019 -2020
Noelin Lava	TCC Counsellor	2020 – current
Noella Okis	TCC Volunteer TCC Counsellor	2020 2021 – current
Staff mainly based at the Torba Counselling Centre		
Grace Ralph	TOCC Counsellor, Project Officer (from 2012)	2011 – current
Ann Joy Sikir	TOCC Office Assistant, Counsellor (from 2012)	2011 – 2020
Folin Joy	TOCC Volunteer, Office Assistant (from 2012) TOCC Counsellor	2011 – 2013 2013 – 2019
Bensalyn Wogale	TOCC Volunteer, Office Assistant (from 2013)	2012 – current
Winne Fred	TOCC Volunteer	2013 – 2019
Junany Marau	TOCC Volunteer	2020 – current
Sandria Worer	VWC Volunteer TOCC Counsellor	2015 – 2016 2020 – current
Annetty Mulenga	TOCC Counsellor	2020 – current
Staff mainly based at the Malampa Counselling Centre		

Name	Role	Time engaged
Aureline Konkon	SCC Volunteer MCC Counsellor and Project Officer	2014 – 2015 2015
Eva Rowsy	SCC Volunteer MCC Office Assistant, Counsellor MCC Community Educator/Counsellor	2014 – 2015 2015 – 2019 2020 – current
Shina Timothy	MCC Project Officer MCC Counsellor MCC Project Officer	2015 2016 2017 – current
Jenny Bui	MCC Volunteer, Office Assistant (from 2017) MCC Counsellor	2015 – 2018 2019 – 2022
Caroline Natnaur	MCC Volunteer and Office Assistant	2015 – 2016
Monica Tuaso	MCC Volunteer and Office Assistant	2015 – 2016
Angela Malisa	MCC Volunteer and Counsellor (from 2017)	2017 – current
Rachel Ores	MCC Volunteer	2017
Grace Antoine	MCC Volunteer, Office Assistant (2019) MCC Counsellor	2018 – 2019 2020 - current
Vionga Daniel	MCC Volunteer, Office Assistant (from 2020)	2018 – current
Melanie Ulas	MCC Volunteer	2021 – current
Staff mainly based at the Penama Counselling Centre		
Rolengas Lolo	PECC Project Officer	2017 – current
Salome Leodoro	PECC Office Assistant, Counsellor (from 2019)	2017 – current
Lamina Still	PECC Volunteer	2017 – 2018
Fabian Balango	PECC Counsellor/Community Educator	2017 – current
Roslyn Garae	PECC Volunteer	2018 – 2020
Elisha Sine	PECC Office Assistant	2020 – current
Matai Reveboe	PECC Counsellor	2021 – current
Leah Vari	PECC Volunteer	2021 – current
Advisors		
Shamima Ali	Coordinator, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, advisor and trainer, along with several FWCC counsellor trainers	1992 – current
Edwina Kotoisuva	Deputy Coordinator, FWCC and Program Manager for VWC funding when FWCC was Managing Agent (1999 – 2012)	1992 – 2014
Andy Lynch	Psychologist/Counsellor trainer	1992-1994
Dr Juliet Hunt	Consultant in strategic planning, monitoring, risk assessment and research Consultant in research and finance	1999 – 2018 2018 – current
Valerie Thompson	Psychologist/Counsellor trainer	2007
Stephen Fisher	Consultant male advocacy trainer	2012
Danielle Roubin	Consultant in monitoring and evaluation	2018 – current
Melkie Anton	Consultant male advocacy trainer	2016 – current

Annex 4: VWC Committees Against Violence Against Women (CAVAWs)

TORBA 1. Hiu 2. Loh 3. Ureparapara 4. Motalava 5. West Vanualava 6. Gaua 7. North Gaua To be established: <i>Merelava</i>	MALAMPA 8. North West B 9. Aulua 10. Maskelyne 11. Burbar 12. Lolihor 13. Paama 14. SE Ambrym 15. North west A
SANMA 16. South Santo 17. Winsao To be established: <i>Vunarei/Big Bay Coast</i> <i>West Coast Santo</i>	SHEFA 18. Lamen Island 19. Varsu 20. Makira 21. Emae To be established: <i>Tongoa (to be re-established)</i> <i>Burumba (to be re-established)</i>
PENAMA 22. Lavui 23. Loltong 24. East Ambae 25. Pangi 26. South Ambae 27. North Ambae To be established: <i>Nduindui (to be re-established)</i> <i>Gaiovo (to be re-established)</i>	TAFEA 28. Williams Bay 29. Port Narvin 30. Aniwa 31. Midmauk 32. Imaki 33. Kamnai, Nth Tanna To be established: <i>Futuna (to be re-established)</i> <i>Aneityum (to be re-established)</i>

Note: This list is current at June 2022. The need for re-establishment occurs due to the impact of disasters (such as on Ambae island in Penama province, where 3 of the original 4 CAVAWs were recently re-established in 2021 and 2022), but also due to the voluntary nature of CAVAW membership and members' own life events.

Annex 5: Notes

ⁱ There have been four World Conferences on Women organised by the United Nations: these took place in Mexico City in 1975 (the World Conference of the International Women's Year); Copenhagen in 1980 (the mid-decade World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women); Nairobi in 1985 (the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the UN Decade for Women); and Beijing in 1995 (The Fourth World Conference on Women), which resulted in The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. The Beijing Conference has been followed by a series of five-year reviews. Each of the four official UN conferences were attended by Government representatives from across the world, and each was accompanied by a parallel NGO meeting or forum attended by many more people: the International Women's Year Tribune in Mexico City in 1975, an NGO Forum in 1980 in Copenhagen, Forum '85 in Nairobi, and the NGO Forum in Huairou near Beijing in 1995 which had around 30,000 participants. For more details see:

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women> (accessed 7 October 2021); and Anne S. Walker 2018 A World of Change: my life in the global women's rights movement, Arcadia, North Melbourne: 113-179.

ⁱⁱ The name, South Pacific Commission (SPC), was changed to the Pacific Community at the 50th anniversary conference in 1997 to reflect the organisation's Pacific-wide membership, although the acronym SPC is still used. See <https://www.spc.int/about-us/history> accessed 11 December 2021.

ⁱⁱⁱ See <https://www.fijiwomen.com/> (accessed 7 October 2021) for details on history, current work and publications of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC).

^{iv} From 1906 to Independence in 1980, Vanuatu was ruled jointly by the French and British Governments in an Anglo-French Condominium (shared Government of what was then called the New Hebrides), with separate administrative arrangements in a range of areas of government. See <https://www.gov.vu/index.php/about/about-vanuatu>; and A Brief History of the Vanuatu Parliament at https://parliament.gov.vu/images/pdf/about_us/history.pdf (accessed 25 November 2021).

^v See Note i for details on these Conferences.

^{vi} In 1991, the Center for Women's Global Leadership convened the first Women's Global Leadership Institute (WGLI). There were 23 participants from different countries including FWCC's Coordinator Shamima Ali. The WGLI participants established the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign, choosing to symbolically link November 25th (International Day Against Violence Against Women) and December 10th (International Human Rights Day). See "The History of the 16 Days Campaign" at <https://16dayscampaign.org/about-the-campaign/the-history-of-16-days/> (accessed 25 November 2021). Due to the establishment of VWC in 1992, Vanuatu has the distinction of being one of the very first countries globally to participate in the 16 Days campaign.

^{vii} The Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women (PWNAVAW, also called the Regional Network by members) was established in 1992 at the first Pacific Regional Meeting on Violence Against Women (attended by the three founders of VWC). See <https://www.fijiwomen.com/> for more information.

^{viii} "Beneath Paradise" was a project conceived by Elizabeth (Sabet) Cox. It brought together grass-roots women from 23 women's movements and civil society organisations from 8 Pacific countries to document their life stories, experiences and the issues that women faced, to prepare and present at the NGO Forum that ran in parallel to the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing (see Note (i) above). The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) played a key facilitating role in bringing women together for 2 meetings to prepare for the event (one hosted by FWCC in Suva, and the second by VWC in Port Vila). FWCC is now custodian of the many and varied materials produced: posters, poems, photographs, testimonials, life stories, and articles, including a published book of poetry by participants (*Beneath Paradise*). The project was funded by the Australian Aid program through the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), and several IWDA staff supported the process (including Sue Finucane, Avega Bishop and Janet Hunt). Sabet Cox, Juliet Hunt, Rae Smart, Sharon Laura and Jill Emberson were resource people.

^{ix} Fiji Women's Crisis Centre 2006 Gender Relations, Women's Human Rights and Violence Against Women: Trainer's Manual, FWCC, Suva.

^x See Note viii.

^{xi} See Note viii.

^{xii} This poem was published in the original *Beneath Paradise* poetry booklet in 1995, and is also in Vanuatu Women's Centre 2020 Violence against young women and girls in Vanuatu: The effectiveness of outreach and prevention strategies VWC, Port Vila: 2. See also Note viii above.

^{xiii} For another insight into the impact that the Beneath Paradise had on participants, see Sarah Garap 2020 “Becoming a grassroots activist” in *The National*, February 10 2020, <https://www.thenational.com.pg/becoming-a-grassroots-activist/> (accessed 7 October 2021); and Sarah Garap 2019 “Ripples of Change in Grassroots Women Organising in Papua New Guinea: A Personal Perspective” Presentation at Australian National University, Department of Pacific Affairs, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, 17 July 2019 <https://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/ripples-change-grassroots-women-organising-papua-new-guinea-personal-perspective> (accessed 7 October 2021).

^{xiv} All the milestones in this section have been taken from VWC internal documentation.

^{xv} See End Note viii above.

^{xvi} The Thursday in Black Campaign grew out of the World Council of Churches Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998) in which the stories of rape as a weapon of war, gender injustice, abuse and violence were shared. <https://wicc.org/thursdays-in-black-called-to-proclaim/> accessed 30 September 2021.

^{xvii} See Note viii above.

^{xviii} See Note i above

^{xix} See Note i above

^{xx} The Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre had done a prevalence survey using a different methodology, published in 1991: FWCC 2001 *The Incidence, Prevalence and Nature of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault in Fiji*, FWCC, Suva. The surveys in Kiribati and Solomon Islands were undertaken by SPC: SPC, 2009, *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study: A study on violence against women and children*, (Report prepared by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community for the Solomon Islands Ministry of Women, Youth and Children’s Affairs, and the National Statistics Office, Ministry of Finance and Treasury, National Reform and Planning), SPC, Noumea; and SPC, 2010, *Kiribati Family Health and Support Study: A study on violence against women and children*, (Report prepared by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community for the Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs, and the Statistics Division, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Republic of Kiribati), SPC, Noumea.

^{xxi} Marilyn Tahī has received 3 awards: the US Woman of Courage Award from the US PNG Ambassador in 2009, the Commonwealth Point of Light Award in 2018 (<https://www.pointsoflight.gov.uk/vanuatu/> accessed 13 October 2021), and the Australian High Commission 2020 International Women’s Day 40th Anniversary Gender Equality Advocate Award (see Tatavola Matas 2020 “Marilyn Tahī: Winner of Winner of the Australian High Commission 2020 International Women’s Day 40th Anniversary Gender Equality Advocate Award” <https://vanuatu.embassy.gov.au/files/pvla/Marilyn%20Tahi%20winner%20of%20the%20Australian%20~%20Women%20s%20Day%2040th%20anniversary%20Gender%20Equality%20Advocate%20Award.pdf> (accessed 9 July 2021).

^{xxii} The milestones in this section are documented in VWC reports to the Australian Government Aid Program, including Annual Plans, Progress Reports, and Activity Completion Reports.

^{xxiii} Australian Government Aid Program 2006 “Review of the VWC Project: Final Report”: 25-26.

^{xxiv} See Note xv.

^{xxv} The octopus refers to an in-joke that was often made in VWC planning and reflection workshops over the last 10-15 years. It was a shorthand for saying was that VWC was trying to be like an octopus, with many arms and partnerships in many places and sectors all over the country – this was VWC’s aim, in order to bring about attitudinal and institutional change. Sometimes the reference to the octopus became a barking dog at the bottom of the tree, and then finally, it became a “barking octopus”.

^{xxvi} Vanuatu Women’s Centre 2020 *Violence against young women and girls in Vanuatu: the effectiveness of outreach and prevention strategies*, VWC, Port Vila.

^{xxvii} The milestones in this section are documented in VWC reports to the Australian Government Aid Program, including Annual Plans, Progress Reports, and Activity Completion Reports.

^{xxviii} Ministry of Justice and Community Services (MOJCS) 2014 *Strategy for the Justice and Community Services Sector: 2014-2017*, MOJCS, Vanuatu.

^{xxix} UN Women 2016 *Women and Children’s Access to the Formal Justice System in Vanuatu*, UN Women.

^{xxx} “Commonwealth Point of Light 40. Marilyn Tahī”, <https://www.pointsoflight.gov.uk/vanuatu/> accessed 30 September 2021.

^{xxxi} Tatavola Matas 2020 *Marilyn Tahī*

<https://vanuatu.embassy.gov.au/files/pvla/Marilyn%20Tahi%20winner%20of%20the%20Australian%20~%20Women%20s%20Day%2040th%20anniversary%20Gender%20Equality%20Advocate%20Award.pdf> accessed 30 September 2021.

^{xxxii} VWC 2020 *Violence against young women and girls in Vanuatu: the effectiveness of outreach and prevention strategies* VWC, Port Vila.

^{xxxiii} The VWC Network refers to the main centre in Port Vila, the 5 branches in the provinces, the CAVAWs that are on all major islands, and the trained male advocates who work closely with VWC across the country to support women living with violence and ensure they have access to safety and justice.

^{xxxiv} FWCC's Regional Training Program is a 4-week training program held in Suva that aims to provide Pacific women and men with the fundamental knowledge needed to understand the issue of violence against women, including the dynamics of violence against women, the many ways that men use power over women, and the prevalent myths about violence against women. It gives participants basic counselling, awareness-raising and advocacy skills to try to address the problem.

^{xxxv} See Note iv.

^{xxxvi} This interview was conducted about 8 months before Marilyn Tahi transitioned from the role of Coordinator to that of Technical Advisor.



Vanuatu Women's Centre and Branches

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VAELENs AGENSEM OL WOMAN INO KASTOM BLONG MI
