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**Telling lives:  
Children's stories of hope, loss, love, and  
violence in Aotearoa/New Zealand**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

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in  
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**Jennifer Jean Infanti**

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# Abstract

This is a descriptive, exploratory study of children's experiences and understandings of domestic violence in the Manawatu region of Aotearoa/New Zealand. It responds to the historical absence of children in anthropological research and in studies of domestic violence.

The research is based on data gathered through group activities and discussions with children, five to twelve years old, in a domestic violence education and support group. A series of life history interviews was also undertaken.

The study uncovers a myriad of ways that children make sense of domestic violence; incorporate their experiences of domestic violence into their identities; and manipulate, adapt, disrupt, or reproduce cultural knowledge about domestic violence in their own lives and relationships. Special focus is given to the role of helping or compassionate social relationships in children's lives, not only for the physical safety of children but also for their ability to cope with domestic violence and bounce back from other hardships in life. The children's narratives shared in this study have practical implications for domestic violence service delivery in New Zealand, as well as applied research with children more generally. The study also highlights children's capacities for powerful observations, insights, and critical analysis.

The thesis itself incorporates many different modes of data (re-)presentation, including poetry, drama, vignettes, and experiments with narrative voice and researcher reflexivity. The use of these literary forms helps to weave multiple perspectives into the thesis, allowing participants to speak for themselves. It also assists in producing an engaging and accessible account of children's lives, which *shows* or *represents* lived experience, an alternative to the large number of statistical analyses that exist in the literature on domestic violence.



# Dedication

*This research would have been entirely different if Chantelle had not been present at every initial programme interview and session of the Dragonflies Tamariki Programme. For your practical assistance, your wisdom, and your keen interest in this work, Chantelle, I am extremely fortunate. For the kind of friendship we shared over the course of our work together—an uncommon and intimate connection of spirit—I am immensely grateful. This work is as much yours as it is mine.*



# Acknowledgments

I have an affection for the overly sentimental, and I must admit to savouring this moment: Writing my own acknowledgments. It is both heart-warming and humbling to reflect on all of the people who have helped this project to its fruition and made my four years in New Zealand a truly wonderful time.

My gratitude extends first to my research participants who made this work possible. Although I cannot name you in this work, I hope I have thanked you enough in person for sharing your time and experiences with me with so much enthusiasm and earnestness. Your stories have touched my life in far-reaching ways.

The Palmerston North Women’s Refuge Trust Inc. played a similarly crucial role in breathing life into my research topic. To Erena, in particular, thank you for giving my ideas unreserved support; I could not have got this project off the ground without it.

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Now, to *ma puce*, otherwise known as Donn, or Little Monster, thank you for starting with me in New Zealand and offering an exciting “escape” to Geneva at the end, and for teaching me how to be (maybe just a little bit) more patient and peaceful. While I have tried to apply your “Five Rules to Thesis Success in Top Speed,” I am lacking the basic qualification—Rule Number One: Be Donn Morrison. Fortunately, I'll soon be on a flight to Switzerland. Thanks also for putting up with all my ‘doubting moments’ and, most of all, for the surprising and delightful way our relationship has been enriched despite of (perhaps because of) so much time and distance.

Finally, to my family in Canada—most of all my mom, Phyllis—thank you for the unqualified belief in my abilities. I am pleased to say that, in fact, you were right, I made it to the end. Mom, I have yet to meet anyone as caring or compassionate as you and your example, I believe, has helped me become a much better researcher. While I cannot share this thesis with Dad, we both know that the hours I spent discussing writing (mine and others) with him fueled my desire to ask questions in general. It might not be the most appropriate place to acknowledge this here, but why not? Let it be in print: I could never have imagined—let alone wished for—better parents.

**J.J.I.**

*Approval for this research was obtained from the  
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# Chapter 1

## It all started in Rio de Janeiro

### The very beginning

Like many research projects, my doctoral work began serendipitously (Hannerz, 1992; James, 1999). In 2001, I met a Brazilian-Canadian woman in an undergraduate anthropology class on South America at the University of Victoria in Canada. We travelled to Rio de Janeiro together the following summer to work with a small social work organisation, *Projeto Memorial de Amor á Infância (PROMAI)*. Our responsibilities with PROMAI included organising social and recreational events for street children in two sprawling urban slums (*favelas*), making recommendations on a strategic plan to redirect resources from individual child support to the underlying socioeconomic factors perpetuating the widespread poverty and despair in the slums. When I consider my experiences in Rio de Janeiro today, I realise they provided invaluable exposure to a range of methodological considerations and problems at play in participatory anthropological fieldwork. Most of all, they strongly reaffirmed my conviction of the need to engage children collaboratively in research, both socially and methodologically. At the time, I was particularly troubled to discover that anthropologists—for the majority of the discipline’s history—had either ignored children’s narratives and lived experiences entirely or paternalistically downplayed their importance. This tendency seemed especially pronounced to me in Brazil, where my experiences led me to believe that most community-based aid organisations narrowly cast street children as passive, needs-driven victims of external social forces, devoid of any agency or initiative to constructively engage their circumstances,

let along fashion complex personal identities of their own. My central concern was that despite anthropology's claim to the study of humanity as a whole, its focus on children and childhood had been peripheral at best. I heartily concurred with Scheper-Hughes' and Sargent's (1998) condemnation of the discipline in *Small Wars* as unacceptably indifferent and disrespectful in this regard:

Children's voices are conspicuously absent in most ethnographic writing, where young people seem to behave like good little Victorians, neither seen nor heard, forming an essential backdrop to everyday life, but mute and unable to teach us anything significant about society and culture. (p. 13-14)

I returned to Canada with a broad goal in mind for a doctoral research project sometime in my future: To bring children into the centre of an anthropological inquiry, whatever the specific focus of the project might be, and thereby help rectify this disciplinary oversight. Two years later I was awarded a Commonwealth Scholarship to study for a PhD in New Zealand. In accepting the award, the location of my field site was chosen for me.<sup>1</sup> My specific research aim, however, remained extremely broad: To demonstrate the various ways children wrestle meaning to make sense of the difficult circumstances of their lives. In turn, I hoped to contribute to the limited anthropological literature on 'children's cultures' and demonstrate the value and importance of incorporating children's views into public policies directly affecting them. My ultimate desire was that the research, if only by virtue of its collaborative emphasis, would help identify and perhaps even transform some of the conditions that have constrained children's legitimate participation in the formation of the public policies that affect their lives.

## Staking 'the field' in Aotearoa/New Zealand

I spent my first eight months in New Zealand meeting with individuals and organisations in the Manawatu, Wairarapa, and Wellington regions of the North Island,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A condition of the Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships Plan is that scholars from one Commonwealth country undertake research in another (host) Commonwealth country. In my case, the "host" country was designated as Aotearoa/New Zealand.

<sup>2</sup>I met with a number of individuals at government and community organisations including Youthline, the Office of the Children's Commissioner, Save the Children New Zealand, Barnardos,

to discuss possibilities for collaborating on a ‘socially meaningful’ research project. Thirty meetings later, however, my study remained largely undefined and I had encountered numerous obstacles to entry into ‘the field.’ Above all, while I had not settled on a specific research topic at this stage, I was determined to explore a pressing social issue or policy question affecting children’s lives in New Zealand, such as the mental health of children’s caregivers, or child abuse, or substance abuse, or poverty. Research on such topics—those with the potential to expose realities which were formerly hidden—continue to carry some stigma or threat precisely because they illuminate the darker corners of society (Lee, 1993). Indeed, “sensitive research” has been described as “threatening,” “risky,” “controversial,” “stressful,” “incriminating,” and “painful,” (Lee, 1993; Lee & Renzetti, 1990; Sieber & Stanley, 1988). The contradiction here is, of course, that social problems “def[y] solution in the absence of increasing knowledge...[thus, they necessarily] require entry into private and/or deviant worlds” (Lee, 1993, p. 16). Clearly this poses challenges for the incumbent fieldworker; the most immediate for me was gaining access to research participants at all.

One of my original desires prior to arriving in New Zealand was to co-create my specific research questions and methods with a children’s reference group or, ideally, with my participants themselves. This suggestion, however, was quickly and recurrently met with disinterest, apprehension, or—worst of all—suspicion, during my initial conversations in New Zealand. To be fair, I believe these reactions were always well-intentioned, rooted in a genuine concern for the emotional safety or well-being of my potential participants. I also did not expect to avoid questions about my research motivations and intentions. For the most part, in fact, I welcomed these inquiries as they highlighted the variety of practical, ethical, and methodological issues I needed to constantly negotiate in order to maintain the safety of each person involved in my proposed research endeavour. The challenge I found most daunting, in terms of gaining access to research participants, was the pervasiveness of social attitudes undermining the knowledge and abilities of children to participate in research *at all*. During my meetings, a number of individuals explained to me that children would not make effective or competent research participants—they were ‘too young’ or ‘too

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and The Peace Foundation, for example, as well as educators, counsellors, social workers, academics, and other post-graduate students.

naive' to give their informed consent; they would have difficulty understanding questions about the 'serious' aspects of their lives; or they simply did not possess the verbal skills to 'accurately' articulate their experiences and feelings. Alternatively, on the occasions where children's competencies to participate in research did seem to be recognised, my proposal was still dismissed—although 'with regret'—in anticipation of the numerous bureaucratic obstacles<sup>3</sup> and gatekeepers<sup>4</sup> that would have to be negotiated. Finally, on a number of occasions, I was warned that children were simply 'too vulnerable' to form a primary research group and, by extension, that projects like mine ran a great risk of (re-)traumatising a child or "intensifying his or her unhappy feelings" (Mann, 2002, p. 11).

Anthropologists commonly experience tensions and cognitive dissonance when they enter new field sites, especially where the site runs against the grain of an individual's previous social or life experiences or presents incompatible attitudes or behaviours (Festinger, 1957; Sanders, 1980). However, rather than simply suffering from "rope burns" in the process of "learning the ropes" of fieldwork (Sanders, 1980), I became increasingly anxious that I would not be able to get a project off the ground at all in New Zealand. Fortunately, I made a spontaneous decision at this point—nearly one year into the PhD programme—to enrol in a 50-hour training course advertised in the local newspaper by the Palmerston North Women's Refuge Trust Incorporated (PNWR).

The PNWR is an affiliated member of the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges in New Zealand (NCIWR), a network of 51 community organisations providing emergency accommodation, a 24-hour crisis telephone service, support and advocacy to women and children leaving violent relationships. I was initially attracted to the organisation's advertisement for volunteers because of its mandate to assist both women and children; I was curious to learn about the effects of family violence on children's lives as well as the services offered to child witnesses to abuse in New Zealand. Upon completing the training, I realised there was an opportunity with the PNWR to take volunteer work a step further; namely, to engage in the research practice Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) has described as "intervening"—the process of becoming a "proactive...[and] interested worker for change" (p. 147). At

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<sup>3</sup>Such as the procedures for obtaining ethical permission to conduct the research.

<sup>4</sup>Most notably, parents or caregivers.

the same time as I joined the collective membership of the PNWR as a volunteer, the organisation hired a part-time children’s advocate, Chantelle Potroz, to begin the process of establishing formal operational services for its child clients. I offered to dedicate my volunteer hours—eventually between 10-25 per week—to designing a domestic violence education and support programme that I would co-facilitate with Chantelle in exchange for the opportunity to invite the programme participants to take part in my research. The Refuge’s collective membership accepted my offer enthusiastically; I had finally found my ‘research home.’

## New beginnings

I spent the next six months adapting a children’s programme created in 1996 by *Te Whare Pounamu*, the Māori<sup>5</sup> Women’s Refuge in Dunedin, for use in Palmerston North, and awaiting its approval for funding from New Zealand’s Ministry of Justice.<sup>6</sup> In the meantime, Chantelle and I participated in a Child Protection Training Programme offered by Child Protection Services New Zealand, and NCIWR training for Tamariki (Children’s) Programme facilitators. We were prepared to begin facilitating the children’s programme in Palmerston North, which I named *Dragonflies*,<sup>7</sup> at the start of the following school term (October 2005). Chapter 3 continues this particular ‘story’ of my research in Palmerston North, documenting the processes and strategies involved in running the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* once

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<sup>5</sup>Māori are New Zealand’s indigenous people. Michael King (1985) defines the word ‘Māori’ as a derivative “from ‘tangata māori’ meaning ordinary people,” referring to the “descendants of the country’s first Polynesian immigrants” (p. 12). King (1985) also writes that the term ‘Māori’ relates closely to “tangata whenua: people of the land, but with connotations of ‘those who were here first’ and ‘host people’” (p. 109). Although my work did not focus on ethnicity, many of my research participants were Māori. In the final chapter of this thesis, I comment on the role and influence of these participants’ identities as Māori in regard to their coping abilities.

<sup>6</sup>I added new discussion topics and activities to the programme based on resources used in family violence education and support programmes operating in North America and the United Kingdom; the manual, *A Safe Place to Grow*, for children in conflicted, violent, and separating homes; and the book *Children Believe Everything You Say* by Jennifer Day. I also replaced most of the original storybooks in the NCIWR programme with newer ones I considered more relevant and interesting, especially for older children, 9-12 years. Appendix A contains a brief outline of the weekly session content of the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*.

<sup>7</sup>The programme brochure is featured in Appendix A to this thesis. It outlines the reasons for choosing the name *Dragonflies* for the group and summarises the programme goals.

it ‘took flight,’ including descriptions of the assessment interviews and a number of group activities. For now, it seems important to note that establishing the children’s programme was my first step in turning “unpromising beginnings into [potentially] effective endings” (Dick, 1993, Advantages and Disadvantages section, para. 2).

Chantelle and I co-facilitated six groups of a total of 22 children between the ages of 5 and 12 years in 2005 and 2006.<sup>8</sup> Ten of these children also participated in research interviews for this dissertation. Each term of the *Dragonflies Programme* became part of a “hermeneutic spiral” for me (Gummesson, 1991); that is, the work we did in the groups informed my understandings of the realities of family violence for children in New Zealand. In turn, my new knowledge helped me make changes to the programme to better suit the children’s expressed needs and interests.

## References points

With a field setting finally established at the Palmerston North Women’s Refuge, I was able to refine my original research questions<sup>9</sup> and aims, exploring a different literature on children and domestic violence than my initial, broad focus on children in anthropological studies and especially children as social, moral, and political agents.<sup>10</sup> I also began to gather the contextual data necessary to situate my participants’ lives in the culture, place, and time of this research. For example, I volunteered weekly with Youthline Palmerston North, an organisation providing 24 hour telephone counselling and support to callers in New Zealand, to gain a better sense of childhood in general in the country. I became actively involved in the Palmerston North Women’s Refuge, regularly attending regional and national meetings and conferences and training programmes for facilitating children’s groups;<sup>11</sup> working on the

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<sup>8</sup>The *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* runs four times per year, during each of the school terms in New Zealand.

<sup>9</sup>Anthropological research is particularly fluid and, as a result, one’s research questions must evolve over the course of the research process in light of the data that emerges from one’s field site and interactions with participants. My research questions have acted as essential *reference* points throughout the PhD journey.

<sup>10</sup>The chapter that follows provides a summary of this literature survey.

<sup>11</sup>I completed a Foundation Course in Interactive Drawing Therapy, and courses in Narrative Therapy from The Family Centre of Wellington Aotearoa and the community organisation, The James Family.

PNWR’s after-hours crisis line and occasionally with Safehouse clients (women and children); and playing a governance role as the organisation’s Treasurer.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, I constantly surveyed government, media, and university reports on domestic violence in New Zealand, learning about its history and prevalence in the country, the changing nature of government involvement and funding to address it, and support and advocacy efforts for victims and perpetrators of violence.

## Capturing experience alive

I have attempted to synthesise the knowledge I gained from my volunteer work experiences, as well as the relationships I built over the course of this research, into the children’s narratives that feature in this thesis and my discussions of them. To give this work its overall form, shape, and voice(s), though, I have drawn directly from my participant’s themselves—their words, narratives, memories, emotions, understandings, hopes, fears, and wishes. I have been cautious not to generalise or over-theorise the children’s stories and have done so only to point to some of the implications of my work for applied research with children. For example, I demonstrate what I have learned in general about working with, listening to, and supporting or ‘skilling’ children to reflect critically on their circumstances in order to better choose amongst and act on the options and advice available to them throughout their lives. What I contribute primarily with this thesis are *representations* of my participant’s accounts of their lives and my “impressions, observations, thoughts, reflections, surmises [and] speculations” (Coles, 1986a, p. 90) about these stories. As with Robert Coles (1986a), the “heart of my work has been listening,” then selecting and describing “the most revealing excerpts” (p. 17) I heard about children’s experiences of domestic violence. This approach reflects my belief that the real learning to be gained from this research is inherent in the ideas of the children—my participants—themselves.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>I discuss the various roles I played over the course of this research throughout the thesis.

<sup>13</sup>One of the greatest rewards of this research for me is the myriad ways I have been inspired and educated by listening to and reflecting on my participant’s life experiences. I have endeavoured to (re-)present these life stories in such a way that readers too will find themselves compelled to reach their own conclusions, learning, and self-insights. This aim is in keeping with Denzin’s (2003b) argument that “the ethnographer’s tale is always allegorical, a symbolic tale, a parable...[and

I have used a number of creative writing strategies in this thesis, including dramatic representation, dialogue, monologue, multiple voicing, poetry, ethnographic fiction, and textual collage. My goal was for the written forms to be interrogative in themselves, stimulating or precipitating new realisations for readers. Like many before me, including Behar (1996), Brady (2000), Ellis and Bochner (1996), and Richardson (1997)—to name only a few—I blur the boundaries between the social sciences and humanities in an effort to come to a more vivid and evocative style of research writing. This strategy helps me to better ‘capture experience alive’ and, by extension, absorbs readers in my participants’ lives. The writing methods and modes of representation I have used in this thesis are an important contribution of this work to the study of children in anthropology and domestic violence research; as such, they are given extended discussion throughout the work, particularly in Chapters 2 and 3.

## Invitation

As this chapter suggests, this thesis is born of coincidences and quirks of fate. I have highlighted some of these circumstances, the ones that led me to undertake this study, for these details not only illuminate my entry point into this research but have also played a significant role in the kinds of information made available to me *or not* over the past four years. I have also introduced my research problem and aims in this chapter in order to establish the trajectory of my enquiry.

Chapter 2 surveys the guiding literature and theory that informs this study, as well as the context of my research in the Manawatu region of New Zealand. It begins with a historical look at children and childhood in anthropology; then considers the main trends in research on children and domestic violence in New Zealand. Finally, it locates the narratives featured in this thesis within the experimental climate of the postmodern era. I identify my commitments to viewing children as meaningful agents and experimenting with literary forms to evoke the lived, emotional experiences of my participants’ lives. I also discuss my intentions to create a text (this thesis) which inspires readers to reflect on the so-called ‘private’ issue of family violence in order

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therefore] a vehicle through which readers may discover moral truths about themselves” (p. 467).

to stimulate critical reflection and possibly even public debate.

Chapter 3 follows the course of my fieldwork, highlighting my research and writing methods and the various roles I played in the process of becoming an ‘engaged anthropologist.’ The heart of the chapter is a four-act play, each act representing a different phase of fieldwork and the variety of issues that arose in this context. Chapter 3 also introduces five research participants—Steven, Olivia, Jamie, Kerry, and Ben—and illustrates the unique ways these children interact and respond to group activities and discussions in the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*. I draw out the most salient themes from Steven’s and Olivia’s life stories on the nature of family violence and abuse and children’s coping strategies for more extended discussion.

Chapters 4 and 5 continue to present my participants’ experiences of domestic violence in Aotearoa/New Zealand, introducing readers to Pania and Joshua via storied ‘re-tellings’ of their lives. I reflect on themes and directions emerging from these narratives. In Chapter 4, these include: Hope, wisdom, resilience, and the importance of informal helpers (siblings, extended family) to children’s coping.<sup>14</sup> In Chapter 5, I consider children’s anger, aggression, the impact of domestic violence on self-identity, and the experience of multiple losses.

I offer interpretations of my participants’ narratives throughout the thesis, with summary conclusions and key messages for domestic violence service-delivery in Chapter 6. This final chapter also identifies the methodological contributions of my research and reflects on where the experience of listening and responding to my participants’ stories of domestic abuse has taken me.

After four years of work on this topic, including many tumultuous days, changes of heart, and overwhelming moments, I have wondered many times: ‘*Why do this at all?*’ I always return to Kaufmann’s (1958) metaphor for counsel:

Some thinkers, like the ant, collect; some, like the spider, spin; some, like the bee, collect, transform by adding of their substance, and create. Vary the metaphor. Men are so many larvae, crawling, wriggling, eating—living in two dimensions. Many die while in this state. Some are transformed and take a single flight before they settle down to live as ants. Few become butterflies and revel in their new-found talent, a

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<sup>14</sup>My emphasis in this chapter is on why and how some children are able to transform the potentially devastating consequences of witnessing and experiencing domestic violence into positive life lessons.

delight to all. (p. 9)

My desire has always been to take the butterfly's 'flight'—to soar to new vantage points with this work, to bring new perspectives to bear. I invite the readers of this thesis to join me on this voyage, through the coincidences, lucky moments, dead ends, pains, and pleasures involved in the research and construction of this work. I begin with 'the bigger story.'

## Chapter 2

### The bigger story

Hegel declared that it was “the task of philosophy, *was bekannt ist, zu erkennen*, to attain knowledge of what is known by acquaintance, what is familiar. Like Socrates, he saw that philosophy cannot abide unquestioning acquaintance” (Kaufmann, 1958, p. 11). Similarly, the broad goal of anthropology is to “explain the behaviour and thoughts” of one’s research participants so that they are more understandable—to make the unfamiliar (at least more) familiar (Watson, 1999, p. 1). My study, indeed, works towards this end: It explores the various ways children make sense of their experiences of domestic violence and, in the process, renders particular ‘childhoods’ more knowable. This topic embodies a paradox, however, for while domestic violence is well-known—an enduring and ubiquitous social phenomenon which extends across cultures and social classes—it is still “not known at all well,” especially from children’s points of view (Kaufmann, 1958, p. 11).<sup>1</sup>

This chapter frames my research within the specific era it was undertaken, exploring the literature, theoretical influences, and contextual details which inform it. I have divided it into three parts, each surveying a discrete body of research, but combining to show where my work fits in the anthropology of childhood; the multi-disciplinary field of domestic violence research in New Zealand; and the “post-experimental moment” in the social sciences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 12).

Part I considers how children and childhood have been portrayed in anthropology from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. It assesses where previous

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<sup>1</sup>As noted in Chapter 1, I address this oversight in this thesis by bringing children to the forefront, adding their voices to the debates about why and how family violence persists over time.

studies have gone, what they have neglected, and how the images and constitutions of childhood they have effected led to the development of my research questions. I locate my work within the most recent trend to view children as ‘social actors.’ In this paradigm, children are no longer considered merely the ‘passive victims’ or ‘silent witnesses’ to violence and abuse; instead, anthropologists “understand that adult representations and interpretations of children’s lives might say more about the observer than the observed” (Mullender et al., 2002, p. 3). As a result, there are pressing moral, methodological, and social imperatives to involve children directly in research about their lives.

Part II examines the conspicuous dearth of research in anthropology and in Aotearoa/New Zealand on children’s understandings of family violence, let alone ethnographies of domestic violence in general. It considers why children’s knowledge on this subject remains largely hidden or unknown. Part II also surveys the history of social and government attention to domestic violence in New Zealand, summarising significant legal milestones and initiatives, and establishing the local research context of the study.

Part III considers the impact of postmodernism on the crafting of ethnography and the narrative strategies I have used to represent my participants’ experiences in the remaining chapters of this thesis. I selected modes of representation to address the gaps in knowledge on children’s experiences of domestic violence identified in Parts I and II of this chapter, particularly to “mirror children as active makers of their worlds” (Das & Reynolds, 2005, para. 31). Following the lead of Veena Das and Pamela Reynolds (2005),<sup>2</sup> I “break from interpretating [children’s] lives within languages and [forms] normally used for understanding [and writing about] adults” (para. 31).

Finally, this chapter concludes by revealing the underlying applied aims of my research in New Zealand, including a desire to be responsive to my participants’ interests and needs; to contribute to an anthropology that is accessible and politically grounded;<sup>3</sup> and to follow an intellectual pursuit in a socially responsible and meaningful way.

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<sup>2</sup>In their study at Johns Hopkins University, *Child on the wing*.

<sup>3</sup>What Scheper-Hughes (1995) has called “an anthropology-with-one’s-feet-on-the-ground” (p. 420).

I begin now at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with anthropology's 'early child.'

## **Part I—The historical framework: Children and childhood in anthropology**

### **Early conceptualisations: From 'evolutionism' to 'socialisation'**

To a large extent, the study of children and childhood in anthropology has always been defined, and limited, by the prevailing conceptualisations and understandings of 'culture' of the day. One of the pioneering ethnographies of childhood, for example, Dudley Kidd's *Savage childhood* (1906), reflects the heavy influence of Charles Darwin's theories of evolution at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the belief that culture was transmitted genetically between generations. Like most anthropologists of his era, Kidd (1906) suggested that "primitive" children, just as their "primitive" parents, stopped developing "normally" at puberty and therefore always remained "less than human."

By the 1920s, the Culture and Personality School in North America, and the structural-functionalists in Britain, advocated an alternative view of cultural transmission; namely, that culture was learned, rather than inherited. This shift of perspective marks the consolidation of the first serious theoretical attention on childhood in anthropology, possibly because of children's remarkable "capacity for learning generally, and learning culture in particular" (Hirschfeld, 2002, p. 611). A literature survey from this period clearly indicates that both new schools of thought retained some of the fundamental beliefs of evolutionists in their portrayals of children and childhood. For example, they continued to perpetuate the notion that children were born into "a world of nature...[and] grew out of biology and into culture" (Ingold, 2005a, p. 5). The difference between the new schools and the earlier evolutionists lay primarily in the processes by which children "transcended nature," becoming more than "merely animal" but also "social and moral being[s]" (Ingold, 2005a, p. 5). The proponents of structural-functionalism and the Culture and Personality school claimed children rose above their nature, or biology, by 'internalising' various mechanisms of 'socialisation' or 'enculturation.' In the process they were 'moulded' into

the ideal adult characters of their specific cultures (Etheridge Woodson, 1999; Foley, 1977; Jenks, 1996).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority of anthropological research from this era focuses on education, child-rearing, and other settings in which social norms are learned by children. By and large, children are assigned to passive roles in this literature, as patients or pupils, for example, while adults are positioned as the agents of their socialisation (doctors, teachers, caretakers, and parents). One of the most illustrative examples of the ‘socialisation’ or ‘enculturation’ approach to the study of childhood is the Six Cultures Study, a long-running research project coordinated by Beatrice and John Whiting at Harvard University. John Whiting’s first publication, *Becoming a Kwoma: Teaching and learning in a New Guinea tribe* (1941), examines the various teaching strategies used by the Kwoma to “inculcate” or “enculturate” children into supernatural beliefs. Children appear to acquiesce knowledge, almost involuntarily, in this work, which spawned two decades of systematic observation and interviewing with hundreds of families in diverse countries.

In the end, the Whitings (with various colleagues) formulated many theories of child development based on the Six Cultures research; their publications range from Whiting and Child’s *Child training and personality: A cross-cultural study* (1953) to Whiting and Edwards’ *Children of different worlds* (1988), three decades later. The overriding characteristic of this work is the establishment of links between a developing child’s personality and the presence or absence of particular cultural variables. For example, the structure of a child’s household makeup (which might be polygamous, monogamous, etc.) was assumed to be directly linked to the sociality of the child (characterised as introverted, extroverted, etc.). In other words, the Six Cultures Study posited a relationship of direct causation between cultural variables and individual personality traits.

Numerous anthropological works in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Erikson’s *Childhood and society* (1950); Opie, Opie, and Warner’s *The lore and language of schoolchildren* (1959); and Brian Sutton-Smith’s *The games of New Zealand children* (1959), promoted a similar view as the Whitings that children progressed from a “natural state” in infancy, via socialisation, to “completion as social persons...with specific social identities and cultural competencies” (Ingold, 2005a, p. 5). The standard argument of the time, therefore, was that “parents [we]re encultured

so their child-rearing practices [we]re also encultured, and, therefore, the product of those practices—the child’s development—[wa]s also encultured” (Hirschfeld, 2002, p. 622).

Perhaps the only notable exceptions to this view during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were the groundbreaking ethnographies of Margaret Mead, particularly *Coming of age in Samoa* (1928) and *Growing up in New Guinea* (1930). In these works, Mead gave unparalleled attention to the fine-grained details of life for young people in the Pacific Islands, providing insights into formerly private areas and topics such as family structure, attitudes towards sex, adolescence, marriage, and child-rearing. Mead’s ethnographies marked a striking difference between her attitudes towards research and writing and the more orthodox views of the vast majority of her colleagues.

### **Emerging critiques: ‘Symbolic interactionism’ to ‘child saving’**

For about fifty years, from the 1920s to 1970s, socialisation and child development theories enjoyed the privileged positions of widely-accepted paradigms in the anthropology of children and childhood. The first vigorous critiques of these approaches emerged in the 1970s, particularly for “overestimating the role that adults play and underestimating the contribution children make to cultural reproduction” (Hirschfeld, 2002, p. 611). In essence, critics argued that socialisation and child development theories were flawed in their inability to account for children’s agency or initiative to act on or, at least, engage with their life circumstances. As well, their focus on an individual’s acquisition of “a cognitive map to facilitate eventual membership into adult society” (Caputo, 1995, p. 29) obscured the child’s role in the initiation and maintenance of social order, not to mention the continuity of socialisation throughout life (Bluebond-Langner, 1978).

Two of the most influential critiques of socialisation theories from within anthropology came from the sub-fields of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology. Herbert Blumer, who coined the term ‘symbolic interactionism’ with his 1969 book, *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*, argued that humans are pragmatic actors, continually adjusting their behaviours based on interpretations of the actions of other actors. This process of adjustment, or accommodation, is aided by our

ability to think about and react to our own actions and even our selves as symbolic objects (Blumer, 1969). Consequently, interactionist theorists suggested that children, like all humans, were actively involved in the construction of their social worlds, contributing even to their own socialisation. Alexander Inkeles, in *Society, social structure, and childhood socialisation* (1968), summarises the interactionist critique of socialisation simply by suggesting: “We cannot ‘put in’ information at one end and ‘get out’ a finished product, the adult, at the other” (p. 77).

Similarly, ethnomethodology—an offshoot of interactionism—focused on the ‘methods’ by which humans make sense of the world and display this understanding to others (Garfinkel, 1984). Ethnomethodologists were especially interested in the ways individuals maintained social order yet simultaneously breached the everyday routines of social interaction. As a result, their work tended to demonstrate the *creativity* humans employed to interpret and maintain social order.

Myra Bluebond-Langer’s ethnography, *The private worlds of dying children* (1978), based on her doctoral research with terminally ill children in an anonymous hospital ward in the United States, exemplifies the ethnomethodologist’s approach. Bluebond-Langer poignantly demonstrates how dying children come to understand their prognoses despite the fact that their parents and medical staff refuse to explain it to them. Her ethnography helps readers glimpse the ways that children adapt to, subvert, and ultimately conceal knowledge of their mortality from their parents, quickly realising that death is an “inappropriate” topic of conversation. Bluebond-Langer (1978) writes of the practice of “mutual pretense” in Western (American) society; essentially, an unspoken agreement to follow certain rules to avoid talking about a child’s prognosis. Children are responsive to this pattern of social order, however, and join in the pretense to enable the maintenance of social roles and responsibilities. In Bluebond-Langer’s opinion, therefore, children are clearly involved in the construction and re-construction of their worlds.

In 1986, child psychiatrist, anthropologist, and educator, Robert Coles, raised a number of questions about the political socialisation of children in his two companion volumes, *The Moral Lives of Children* and *The Political Lives of Children*. Both books include numerous dialogues and interviews with children around the world, offering compelling insights into the ways children are “constantly at work noticing what is just, what is unjust; [ultimately] rendering their judgments” (Lipman, 1986,

p. 106). Lipman (1986) concludes his review of the volumes with the suggestion that readers may be surprised by the “portrait Coles’ paints of children” as creative, insightful individuals of “moral stature” because “we are more accustomed to the portrait[s] drawn by some developmentalists, who depict children as weak, vulnerable, ignorant, egocentric, gullible and naive” (p. 107). Indeed, Coles’ works offer some of the earliest perspectives on children as agents, preceding a more general theoretical turn in this direction in the 1990s. Coles also recognised that children have political lives of their own and are deeply affected by the politics and economics of their cultures.

In large part, the successful reception of *The Moral Lives of Children* and *The Political Lives of Children* in anthropology and other fields concerned with childhood studies, was their resonance with a considerable international focus at the time, particularly in the news media, on the suffering and mistreatment many children faced on a daily basis. In this respect, the United Nation’s International Year of the Child in 1979 “posed an international wake-up call to the deplorable state of children in many parts of the world” (Korbin, 2003, p. 431). In response, over the 1980s, aid workers, journalists, and researchers in many fields shifted their traditional foci on children’s lives from the realms of education, health, and child-rearing to the plight of the world’s “less fortunate children” (Behera and Trawick, 2002, p. 3). In the developing world, research concentrated on victims of war, starvation, preventable diseases, famine, and forced migration, while in industrialised countries it investigated the links between capitalism, colonisation, and globalisation and the poverty and suffering of many children in the so-called ‘privileged world.’

Anthropologists also focused more attention than ever on child neglect and survival during the 1980s. Jill Korbin’s groundbreaking study in 1981, *Child abuse and neglect*, was instrumental in sharpening the discipline’s lens on the considerable variation in the treatment of children across cultures. Korbin continued this work over two decades, clarifying different levels of child maltreatment cross-culturally; such as, “cultural-level acts” [of violence], “idiosyncratic departures from cultural standards that result in child maltreatment,” and “societal abuse and neglect of children” (Korbin, 1980; 1981; 1997; 2003). Critically for my research, however, Korbin’s work on cultural violence did not generate an increased or sustained focus in anthropology on the violence children experience in the domestic arenas of their lives.

## Children as social actors

The attention to children as the victims of often terrible tragedies during the 1980s is known today, in childhood studies, as the ‘child-saving era’ (Boyden, 1997; Hart, 2006). It became strikingly obvious during this time that childhood was not always a time of “protective custody” (Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998, p. 24). Children were increasingly seen as victims in need of society’s protection. Paradoxically, though, a contrasting view also emerged from this recognition; namely, that children were persons in their own right, as opposed to individuals in the process of becoming adults.<sup>4</sup>

My work fits within this trend, which coalesced in the 1980s as the contemporary “ethnography of childhood movement” (James, 1999, p. 100).<sup>5</sup> After decades, therefore, whereby researchers had maintained the simplistic argument that children passively ‘absorbed’ cultural knowledge from their elders by means of ‘socialisation,’ it was finally acknowledged that learning is not a simple one-way process. As Ingold (2005b) remarks, knowledge does not descend upon children as if the child’s mind is some kind of container ready to be filled up with specific cultural content. This view is decidedly adult-centered, reflecting the failure of anthropologists and other social scientists for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to recognise children as agents with purposes and perspectives of their own (Ingold, 2005b).

There are a number of key proponents of the ‘children as social actors’ approach to the study of childhood. It was Allison James and Alan Prout, though, who broke new ground in 1990 with their seminal book, *Constructing and reconstructing childhood*. Since then, James and Prout have continued to move the anthropology (and sociology) of childhood forward, advocating for the improved status of children in research and society, including respect for children’s rights, opinions, and voices. James and Prout have been joined by a chorus of researchers—including, for example, Chris Jenks (*Theorising childhood*, with James and Prout, 1998); Pia Christensen (*Conducting research with children*, with James, 2000); and Berry Mayall (*Towards*

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<sup>4</sup>This shift of perspective corresponded with a broader movement in anthropology towards the view of *all* individuals as socially constructed agents—that is, the intentional actors in, as well as products of, social processes (James & Prout, 1997; Kitzinger, 1997).

<sup>5</sup>James (1999) notes that this movement followed “Hardman’s (1973) lead in seeing children as competent social actors who could be articulate about what the social world is like for them” (p. 100).

*a sociology for childhood: Thinking from children's lives*, 2002). Virginia Caputo (1995) summarises the theoretical orientation of these researchers with the following statement:

Understanding the child from the perspective of his world is to hold the view that, despite biological and developmental determinants, the growing child is an intentional actor constructing a life project with consciousness, that becoming in the world involves a dynamic self-representation, that the child too is a historical being, a maker of history, a meaning-maker. (p. 33)

James, Prout, and their colleagues have also emphasised the important role that ethnography plays in the study of children and childhood. In the preface to their second edition of *Constructing and reconstructing childhood* in 1997, they suggest ethnography may be “the most important” method for studying children, considering the ever increasing engagement between the worlds of research and practice and the close attention ethnographers can bring to children’s everyday lives (James & Prout, 1997, p. xvi).

Ten years later, ethnographic research on children’s lives has indeed burgeoned. Recent anthropological studies have been published on a wide spectrum of topics, including—amongst many others—the so-called “cult of overachieving” in many middle- and upper-class schools (Robbins, 2006); how children maintain everyday life in zones of violent conflict (Das & Reynolds, 2003); gender discrimination and the care of female children in Chinese families following China’s One-Child Policy (Short, Zhai, Xu, & Ma, 2001); children’s responses to witchcraft accusations in Sierra Leone (Ferme, 2001); and racialised childhoods in Canadian political discourse (Helleiner, 2001). In 1999, James writes of a “more mature contemporary 1990s account” to ethnographies of childhood which acknowledges “the fact that to write about the social construction of childhood from the child’s perspective, is not to make claims to reveal the authentic child. More humbly, it is to provide a rendering of what childhood might be like” (p. 100). Indeed, this is the aim of my work in New Zealand: To proffer suggestions about what childhood *might be like* in the context of domestic violence. As Part II demonstrates now, there is considerable work that needs to be done on this topic for, to date, children’s experiences of violence in their homes has yet to be taken up as a primary topic of study by many anthropologists. The scope

of Part II is broad and includes a survey of: Anthropological research on domestic violence; the history and realities of domestic violence in New Zealand; and research in New Zealand on children's experiences of domestic violence.

## Part II—Domestic violence in anthropology and Aotearoa/New Zealand

### Anthropological research on domestic violence

In 1984, anthropologist Gerald Erchak appealed to his colleagues to recognise the potentially fertile field of research on domestic violence, remarking that it had appeared only “randomly in ethnographic descriptions” throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Bohannan, 1960; Chagnon, 1983; and Fernea, 1969, cited in Erchak, 1984, p. 331), but was nonetheless a significant cross-cultural social phenomenon. Erchak also embarked on his own study of spousal abuse in Micronesia at this time, the early 1980s. However, after encountering a “wall of harsh reviews...[he was] reroute[d] to the United States” and ultimately forced to abandon his project (McClusky, 2001, p. 6). Ten years later, still attempting to make sense of the dearth of research in anthropology on family violence, Erchak contributed a chapter to the edited volume, *Research frontiers in anthropology* (1994). In this piece, he hypothesised that the primary reason for anthropology's avoidance of domestic abuse, as with other “less savory elements of native cultures,” was its potential to destabilise the discipline's esteemed principle of cultural relativism (McClusky, 2001, p. 6).

Whatever the case, the first full-length anthropological monograph on domestic abuse, *Family violence in cross-cultural perspective*, was published only as recently as 1989, by David Levinson. It rested entirely on the cross-cultural analysis of “90 small-scale, peasant societies selected from the Human Relations Area Files Probability Sample Files” (Saltzman, 1990, p. 280). Levinson coded the ninety societies for the presence or absence of specific behaviours he considered indicative of four types of family violence: Wife beating, punishment of children, sibling fighting, and husband beating (Counts, 1990, p. 365). Next, he attempted to link the existence or absence of these specific types of abuse to the social structures of each society in question, as

well as nine popular theoretical perspectives<sup>6</sup> in anthropology at the time. Levinson's efforts drew attention to domestic violence as a topic of anthropological inquiry; his findings, however, based entirely on the assumption that "statistical relationships are evidence of cultural meaning...[were] methodologically flawed" (Counts, 1990, p. 365).

Also in the late 1980s, Dorothy Counts, Judith Brown, and Jacquelyn Campbell organised the first session of the American Anthropological Association (1987) on the study of domestic violence, as well as "three sessions and a symposium for the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania between 1986 and 1988" (McClusky, 2001, p. 4). In 1992, Counts et al. published a collection of anthropological articles on domestic violence based on the papers presented at these conferences, *To have and to hit: Cultural perspectives on wife beating*.<sup>7</sup>

Two years later (1994), another edited volume, *Sex and violence: Issues in representation and experience*, published the findings of a variety of ethnographic and theoretical studies on family violence. In particular, *Sex and violence* enriched anthropological understandings of the various contexts within peasant and working class societies in which gendered violence takes place (Di Leonardo, 1996). Di Leonardo's (1996) review article of the volume commends it for "pav[ing] the way for new cross-cultural and historical considerations of the links between sex and violence" (p. 758). Di Leonardo (1996) also noted a positive change in the academic climate of the early 1990s which contributed to the widespread reception and appeal of *Sex and violence*; a result—in her opinion—of the "maturation of feminist anthropology, [and] the rise of gay and lesbian studies" (p. 758).

Near the end of the 1990s, feminist sociologist, Aysan Sev'er, edited a broad collection of chapters on domestic violence by anthropologists, sociologists, social workers, lawyers, and scholars of women's studies, *A cross-cultural exploration of wife abuse: Problems and prospects* (1997). In her introductory chapter to the volume, Sev'er (1997) suggested that "wife abuse remains to be one of the most underreported crimes" (p. 2). However, she pointed to four progressive trends in social and academic thought on domestic violence, including the recognition of "women's

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<sup>6</sup>Resource theory, exchange theory, culture of violence theory, patriarchal theory, social learning theory, ecological theory, evolutionary theory, sociobiological theory, and general systems theory (Levinson, 1989, p. 82-85).

<sup>7</sup>*To have and to hit* was re-published with new and revised material in 1999.

capacity to survive rather than their passive victimisation; the race/gender/class multiplexities rather than a unidimensional analysis of patriarchy; variations in sexual orientation rather than the presumption of heterosexuality; and women's agency and empowerment" (Sev'er, 1997, p. 2). Overall, the chapters in Sev'er's volume are theoretically rich and varied. They consider a multiplicity of factors, including socio-legal, cultural, personality, class and gender, that contribute to wife abuse, yet suggest what is "most frightening [of all]...is the historic relentlessness of abuse of women by men from all walks of life" (Sev'er, 1997, p. 19-20).

Finally in 2001, Laura McClusky published the first full-length ethnography of male-to-female partner abuse,<sup>8</sup> *"Here, our culture is hard:" Stories of domestic violence from a Mayan community in Belize*. McClusky's book offers one of the most intimate and honest views of domestic violence in the anthropological literature to date. Hautzinger (2003), who reviews the ethnography for *American Ethnologist*, considers it a "beautifully storied...complex and nuance[d]...exploration of interpersonal violence" (p. 470). What sets McClusky apart from the vast majority of researchers of domestic violence ahead of her is the narrative style of her writing. She includes long and detailed dialogues with her participants to situate their accounts of domestic violence within "very human relationships" (Canessa, 2003, p. 653). By extension, readers have the opportunity to become deeply familiar with her participant's lives. Few ethnographies of domestic violence since McClusky's have offered as much depth, descriptive detail, or reflexivity. I have attempted to emulate her style of narrative ethnography, focusing on the particularities of life for my research participants in New Zealand, for I agree with Abu-Lughod (1991) that:

The special value of this strategy is that it brings out similarities in all our lives...[Focusing on] the particulars suggest[s] that others live as we perceive ourselves living, not as robots programmed with "cultural" rules, but as people going through life agonizing over decisions, making mistakes, trying to make themselves look good, enduring tragedies and personal losses, enjoying others, and finding moments of happiness. (p. 156-157)

In turn, my intent in adopting a narrative approach like McClusky's, is to "build

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<sup>8</sup>Described as "lashings" in the Mopan village where McClusky lived while conducting her field research.

an emotional relationship joining the writer, the life told about, and the reader” (Denzin, 2003b, p. 462-463).<sup>9</sup>

In the past ten years, a number of monographs on domestic violence have been published. For example, Adelman’s 2004 review for *American Ethnologist* considers works by McGillivray and Comaskey (1999), Websdale (1998), Abraham (2000), and Engle Merry (2000). Domestic violence seems to be receiving more attention today than ever before in the discipline’s history. However, in terms of anthropological considerations to *children’s* unique experiences of domestic abuse, the literature is still sorrowfully lacking.

Mullender et al.’s book, *Children’s perspectives on domestic violence* (2002), appears to be the only publication by anthropologists specifically on children’s understandings of family violence. This book publishes the results of a study that fell under the umbrella of the larger “Children 5-16 Programme: Growing Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” funded by the Economic and Social Research Council in the United Kingdom in the late 1990s.<sup>10</sup> The research project, led by Mullender et al., involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, including an extensive survey administered to over 1000 children in primary and secondary schools, as well as in-depth interviews with 45 children who had lived with family violence in the United Kingdom. *Children’s perspectives on domestic violence* is an exemplary model of how children’s opinions and voices on family violence can be incorporated into research, as well as a variety of strategies researchers can use to assist child participants to negotiate what is said about them in the presentation of research data. My research corroborates many of Mullender et al.’s key findings, especially for policy and practice on domestic violence. I make these connections in the final chapter of this thesis (Chapter 6).

Thus far in this chapter, I have shown a demonstrable shift of perspective in anthropology over the 20<sup>th</sup> century which has transformed children from the passive recipients of knowledge descended from their elders to the active agents of their lives and learning. Regardless of this paradigm change, however, there remains almost

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<sup>9</sup>I continue this discussion in Part III of this chapter.

<sup>10</sup>The specific project was titled “Children’s Needs, Coping Strategies and Understandings of Women Abuse.” Information on the study design and academic and policy implications are discussed briefly on the website for the ESRC Research Programme, Children 5—16: Growing into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. See <http://www.hull.ac.uk/children5to16programme/details/mullende.htm>.

no qualitative, detail-rich studies of children's lived, emotional experiences of domestic violence. The situation is similar in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where children's viewpoints on domestic violence have neither been well-studied nor are they well-understood. The following section turns specifically then to the New Zealand setting of my study.

### **Aotearoa/New Zealand: The local research context**

Over the four year period of my research in New Zealand (2004-2008) there has been an unparalleled recognition of the high rates of domestic violence and violence against children in the country, as well as a corresponding surge in government funding and attention to domestic abuse (Carroll-Lind, Chapman, Gregory, & Maxwell, 2006; Doolan, 2004; New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2006; Wood, 2006). Indeed, the list of government-coordinated initiatives dedicated to domestic violence prevention and response is ever-growing in New Zealand. To name only a few examples, the Ministry of Social Development is currently piloting a nation-wide community prevention campaign, *Changing Attitudes and Behaviours*; the Ministry of Health is coordinating a public health programme for the prevention of family violence; and the Ministry of Justice is concurrently establishing and evaluating four specialist family violence courts across the country.<sup>11</sup>

One of the most significant initiatives of recent years is the New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse (NZFVC). The Clearinghouse is a collaborative initiative established in 2005 by the Ministry of Social Development, Child Abuse Prevention Services (NZ) Inc., the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges Inc., Te Kupenga Whakaoti Mahi Patunga/National Network of Stopping Violence Services (NZ) Inc., and the University of Canterbury's Te Awatea Violence Research Centre. It is an invaluable resource for researchers and domestic violence service providers as it maintains an extensive annotated bibliography of research, evaluation, policy, and practice related to domestic violence in New Zealand; practical community resources for violence prevention initiatives; 'good practice' guidelines and standards; and links to local and international family violence-related websites, conferences, and other

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<sup>11</sup>For a more complete and frequently updated list of family violence-related initiatives currently being implemented at the national level in New Zealand, see: <http://www.nzfvc.org.nz/Initiatives.aspx>.

current events.

The history of social and government attention to family violence in New Zealand closely parallels the rise of the ‘battered women’s movement’ in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. In 1973, in Christchurch, New Zealand, a collaboration of university and radical feminists and the national organisation, Sisters for Homophile Equality, established the first Women’s Refuge on the heels of the political and social activism of the 1960s throughout the industrialised world. By 1981, the Refuge movement consisted of 11 member organisations and was continuing to grow steadily. At this point, the organisations made a decision to consolidate into the umbrella agency, the National Collective of Independent Women’s Refuges Inc. (NCIWR). Collectively, the NCIWR provided a stronger voice for victims of domestic violence across the country and an improved ability to coordinate the delivery of core services: Emergency accommodation, crisis telephone support, and group education programmes to female victims of abuse. In addition, the NCIWR lobbied the government in New Zealand to make changes to the legal system that would grant the courts and police the tools and rights to prosecute perpetrators of abuse within the ‘private’ home. The following year, 1982, the Domestic Protection Act was passed into law in New Zealand, providing the first legal protection for victims of domestic abuse in the country.

Over the next ten years, the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, the NCIWR continued to expand its membership, incorporating its first Māori Refuge, *Te Whakaruruhau*, in the city of Hamilton in 1987, and first Tangata Pasifika Women’s Refuge in Auckland in 1989. Both Refuges provided culturally-appropriate services to New Zealand’s indigenous and Pacific Islands populations. Also during this period the Hamilton Abuse Intervention Project (HAIP) was launched, based on the highly influential Duluth Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) from Duluth, Minnesota (USA). The Duluth model “contextualized violence within a cultural framework of power, domination, and control based on gender entitlements” (Balzer, 1999, p. 239). It attracted widespread support in New Zealand, particularly amongst Māori and non-Māori women in the Refuge movement, and ultimately became the standard (and enduring) “national practice for domestic violence work” (Balzer, 1999, p. 253-254).

Until 1995 then, community organisations in New Zealand led the movement against domestic violence. Government and tertiary agencies began to play a more

active role in both intervention work and research following the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act 1995 (DVA 1995), a significantly improved version of its predecessor, the Domestic Protection Act 1982. The DVA 1995 re-defined domestic violence to include psychological abuse, in addition to sexual and physical abuse. It also implemented the current Protection Order in New Zealand which is valid regardless of whether an individual leaves his or her violent partner or continues to live in the same domestic relationship. The Protection Order of 1995 also makes it compulsory for violent persons—those in receipt of a Protection Order—to attend court-approved education programmes.

Also in 1995, the government's Department of Social Welfare created a Family Violence Unit and, within it, a Family Violence Focus Group. The Family Violence Focus Group was tasked with the responsibility of compiling a baseline database of existing research on domestic abuse in the country at the time. The document, *An Agenda for Family Violence Research*, published in 1998, identified gaps in the knowledge base on domestic abuse and developed a list of priorities for future research. *The Agenda* has recently been updated by the newly formed New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse and now includes a searchable online database of 561 research abstracts. It is an essential baseline resource for researchers of domestic violence in New Zealand.

## **Children in domestic violence research in Aotearoa/New Zealand**

Research on children's experiences of domestic violence in New Zealand is marked by a number of trends and shortcomings. The NZFVC database currently contains 219 articles under the search field 'children and domestic violence,' including evaluative research, which collates feedback on domestic violence interventions in the country (see Davies, Koziol-McLain, Nicholls, & Stasiak, 2005); a significant number of studies on the intersections between the abuse of women and the abuse of children, as well as women's violence towards children (for example, Pocock, 2003; Ritchie, 2005); and research on children's perceptions of physical punishment (Dobbs, 2005; 2007; Taylor, 2005). In addition, there is an important literature on the recently-overturned Section 59 of the Crimes Act in New Zealand, which granted parents the right to

discipline their children as they saw fit, despite its incompatibility with international law (Hancock, 2004; Ludbrook, 2007; Taylor, 2005). There are also a smaller number of illuminating studies on the incidence and prevalence of domestic violence in New Zealand and the subsequent vulnerability of children to abuse (for example, see Carroll-Lind et al., 2006; Maxwell, 1994). Amongst these, Carroll-Lind et al.'s (2006) national survey research of the experiences of family- and school-based violence of 2077 children (between 9 and 13 years) is particularly notable for its innovative use of a passive consent procedure—whereby parents had to opt-out of the research, rather than opt-in<sup>12</sup>—as well as its attention to children's own experiences and viewpoints.

The vast majority of research on children and family violence in New Zealand, however, focuses on the physical, psychological, and behavioural effects of witnessing or experiencing abuse, including psychosomatic symptoms, fear, hyper-vigilance, outbursts of anger or aggression, and anti-social behaviour, to mention only a few (see Fergusson, 1998; Fortune & Lambie, 2005; Henderson, 1996; Martin, Langley, & Millichamp, 2006; Maxwell, 1994; Pocock & Cram, 1996; Robertson & Busch, 1994). Typically, this work is based on standardised measures of children's behaviours which, in turn, are interpreted and explained “in relation to theories of child development, parent-child relationships, and psychological reactions to stress” (Achenback & Edelbrock, 1983, cited in Pocock, 2003, p. 42). The results tend to confirm what we know intuitively: Children who witness violence in their homes are more likely to experience behavioural and emotional adjustment difficulties in the other settings of their lives than children who do not. What is rarely gained from this research is insight into situations where children are not only ‘victims’ of hardship but, rather, show active survival and coping strategies. In addition, children themselves are often glaringly missing in these studies; that is, their voices are seldom represented well, if at all. Instead, we ‘hear’ from children in isolated paragraphs or vignettes in this literature, their lives and experiences seemingly cut off from the social relationships and environmental and structural conditions surrounding and affecting them.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of domestic violence service-provision in New Zealand (prevention and response work), children have also been significantly absent on the whole. For exam-

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<sup>12</sup>Carroll-Lind et al. (2006) argue that “by removing adult filters,” the use of a passive consent procedure is one means “to gain direct access to children's perceptions of violence” (p. 979).

<sup>13</sup>To address these shortcomings in my own work, as I have noted earlier, I have worked solely (and directly) with children and have included their *extended* narratives in this thesis.

ple, the Refuge movement, which began in 1973, only implemented formal children's programmes in 2000 with the financial backing of Save the Children New Zealand.<sup>14</sup> Other similar organisations providing support and counseling services to children who have witnessed or experienced domestic violence in New Zealand—for example, Barnardos and Methodist Social Services across the country and the VOYAGE Programme in Palmerston North—have always been and, indeed, continue to be under-funded and under-staffed.

Overall, Carroll-Lind et al. (2006) suggest that researchers seeking to access “authentic information about the impact of violence on children” in New Zealand have been plagued with numerous challenges, including the hegemony of adult representations of children's views and experiences; a “lack of trust regarding the validity of children's views;” and ongoing concerns and debates over the “ethical issues” of research with children, which—rather than protecting children from harm—have ultimately “prevented access to children's views” altogether (p. 979). As mentioned in Chapter 1, I encountered all of these challenges myself over the course of this research. However, despite these restrictions, the narratives I share in the remaining chapters of this thesis provide intimate and emotional representations of the experiences of children living with domestic violence in New Zealand. As this chapter has demonstrated, there are few precedents for this kind of research to build on in this country, but significant gaps to fill.

The final section of this chapter now considers how the postmodern movement in the social sciences has influenced my data presentation. I discuss how postmodernism has engaged the “intertwined problems of subjectivity, authority, authorship, reflexivity, and process on the one hand, and representational form on the other” (Richardson, 2003, p. 511) in order to frame the narratives that I present in Chapters 3–5 of this thesis.

## Part III—Writing stories, showing lives

“Experience exists only in its representation, it does not stand outside memory or perception” (Denzin, 2003b, p. 471). Indeed, the understanding that we gain of

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<sup>14</sup>Some Refuges have been running self-funded children's programmes from earlier dates.

our participants' lives through anthropological fieldwork is only part of the task at hand; translating this knowledge—representing it—is imperative. Clifford (1986) has suggested that anthropologists, in fact, *begin* with writing, arguing for the centrality of 'making texts' to what we do both in and after the field. The 'translation' of my research data, to construct this thesis, involved multiple and ongoing layers of interpretation, analysis, and presentation throughout the project.<sup>15</sup> The choices I eventually made were informed by my goal to address the gaps in research identified in Parts I and II of this chapter<sup>16</sup> and, secondly, by the influences of three decades of discussion, debate, and writing experiments in anthropology and all of the other social sciences. I refer here to a period that Denzin and Lincoln (2003) have described as nothing short of a "methodological revolution" (p. ix), and what has been variously named by others as the "postmodern condition" (Lyotard, 1988), the "crisis of legitimation" (Habermas, 1975), and the "experimental moment" (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). The remainder of this section discusses the significant impact of this era on anthropology and my own work within the field.

In 1986, Clifford wrote: "It has long been asserted that scientific anthropology is also an 'art,' that ethnographies have literary qualities" (p. 4). Widespread recognition of this statement crystallised in anthropology in the 1980s, due largely to Clifford and Marcus' publication of *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography* (1986), as well as Marcus and Fischer's *Anthropology as cultural critique: An experimental moment in the human sciences* (1986). Both edited collections called into question the basic premises of anthropology, including its traditional modes of representation and the relationships between subject and author and evidence and research that they perpetuated (Crapanzano, 1980; Dumont, 1978; Rabinow, 1977). Reflection on anthropology's "primary research method: participant-observation or fieldwork"—and, in particular, its "messy, complicated, [and] *dialogic* nature"—also led to a general discrediting of the traditional binary between research and representation (McClusky, 2001, p. 16). It became increasingly accepted instead that the "acts

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<sup>15</sup>For example, I made numerous writing decisions as I read through my interview transcripts, aiming to select the most effective mode of expression—poetry, drama, first-person narration (etc.)—for the presentation of each participant's narrative. I consider my specific *writing methods* in Chapter 3 and discuss my decisions to use particular modes of representation preceding each of the relevant stories throughout this thesis.

<sup>16</sup>Most of all, as mentioned earlier, I wanted to present my data in a way that emphasised children's agency, as well as the complex and varied knowledge of domestic violence children possess.

of observing or ‘gathering data’ and subsequent reports on these processes...[were] inextricably intertwined” (Behar & Gordon, 1995; Gergen, Chrisler, & LoCicero, 1999; Visweswaran, 1994, cited in Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1027).

The already rich tradition of feminist theory in the 1980s added to the debates within and about anthropology. Feminism drew attention to “the historical [and] political construction of identities and self/other relations” (Clifford, 1986, p. 19). The self-consciously reflexive stance that feminist scholars assumed toward their research participants also exposed the biases, and other influences, that researchers bring to all settings of their work; the participation of feminist researchers in collaborative endeavours showed “the traditional, and largely unjustified...notion of research and scholarship as the heroic quest by the lone scholar for ‘truth’ ” (Mascia-Lees et al., 1989, p. 24). The growing field (or, more appropriately, ‘practice’) of applied anthropology played a similarly critical role. Applied anthropology emphasised the value of deriving research questions and applying research methods “to the solution of problems defined by the people being studied” (Mascia Lees, Sharpe, & Ballerino Cohen, 1989, p. 23-24).

Indeed, all of these conversations coincided with the goals of postmodernism, as characterised in the following quote by Jane Flax (1987):

Postmodern discourses are all ‘deconstructive’ in that they seek to distance us from and make us skeptical about beliefs concerning truth, knowledge, power, the self, and language that are often taken for granted within and serve as legitimation for contemporary Western culture. (Cited in Mascia Lees, Sharpe, & Ballerino Cohen, 1989, p. 19-20)

The origins, key concepts, and restructuring influences of postmodernism on the humanities and social sciences have been written about extensively (for example, see Rosenau, 1992; and Turner, 1994). Ultimately, for anthropologists, postmodernism led to a general acceptance in the discipline that no study is ever objective or dispassionate, nor is the anthropologist him or herself merely a set of “observing eyes” uncovering cultural ‘truths’ in the field (Clifford, 1986, p. 6). Rather, anthropology today rests on a foundation which makes clear that the ‘product’ that eventually meets the eye—whether it is an ethnographic film, image, or written work—is necessarily constrained by the human perception and choice which ultimately constitutes it. The researcher—in essence, and inescapably—invests his or her point of view,

whether consciously or not. Therefore, any representation is at best a “partial truth” (Clifford, 1986, p. 6).

## Writing experiments

Richardson (2003) notes that:

In the wake of the postmodernist—including poststructuralist, feminist, queer, and critical race theory—critiques of traditional qualitative writing practices, qualitative work now appears in multiple venues in different forms. Science-writing prose is not held sacrosanct. The ethnographic genre has been blurred, enlarged, altered to include poetry, drama, conversations, readers’ theater, and so on. (p. 509)

To be certain, one of the most profound outcomes of the postmodern era is the huge explosion of new written forms<sup>17</sup> that accompanied it. Gone are the days of traditional ethnographies; the new ethnography is characterised by interdisciplinary venturesomeness and unconventional departures in form (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). To write of all the styles and modes of ethnography that exist today is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, I note a few of the major trends—reflexive writing, auto-ethnography, and ethnographic fiction—before turning to the most influential form for my study: Narrative ethnography.

## Reflexive texts

Reflexive texts feature the fieldworker as a central player or actor in the ethnographic situation; today, they are commonplace in anthropology. Reflexive writing is based on widescale acknowledgment that the anthropologist is never an objective narrator or authority; indeed, it challenges the “myth of ‘silent authorship’ ” (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1997, cited in Goode, 2007, p. 366). By becoming a character in the “fieldwork account” (Clifford, 1986, p. 14), the researcher transforms instead into a “speaking subject, [one] who sees as well as is seen, who evades, argues, probes back...In this view, ‘culture’ is [seen as] always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, *between* subjects in relations of power”

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<sup>17</sup>Replacing traditional science-writing.

(Dwyer, 1977; Tedlock, 1979, cited in Clifford, 1986, p. 14-15). Indeed, reflexive writing, by including the anthropologist's voice, highlights the intersubjective nature of our research relationships.

Other related attempts to “remove the single voice of [author] omniscience” from research writing include allowing participants to speak for themselves, often in the form of extended narratives or ‘life stories,’ or including multiple and sometimes contradictory conclusions in discussions of research findings (Anderson, 1997; Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997; Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Reinhartz, 1992).

### **Autoethnography**

Similar concerns about the ‘false objectivity’ of authors’ accounts and ‘researcher bias’ have led to a flourishing of autoethnography in recent years. Autoethnography is a form of writing which melds “the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). It can be written in many styles, such as novels,<sup>18</sup> performances,<sup>19</sup> and others (for example, see Jago, 2002; Jones, 2005; and Ronai, 1995). The researcher, as the name implies, is always the primary subject of an auto-ethnography and texts are generally written in the first-person voice. They may “feature dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture” (Ellis & and Bochner, 2000, cited in Goode, 2007, p. 366). Autoethnography “lends itself well to private, sensitive, perhaps hidden areas of social life” (Goode, 2007, p. 366).

### **Ethnographic fiction**

Abu-Lughod (1991) remarks that “the one insight of Geertz’s about anthropology that has been built upon by everyone in this “experimental moment” (Marcus & Fischer, 1986) who takes textuality seriously...[is] that one of the main things anthropologists do is write, and what they write are fictions (which does not mean they are fictitious)” (p. 148). The central issue that Geertz raised in his 1988 book,

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<sup>18</sup>See Carolyn Ellis’s *The Ethnographer’s I* (2004).

<sup>19</sup>See the anthologies, *The Ends of Performance* (1998) and *Performance ethnography: Critical pedagogy and the politics of culture* (2003).

*Works and lives: The anthropologist as author*, is that anthropological writing is—and always has been—fictional, in the sense of being “something made, something constructed” (Brady, 2003, p. 549).

Since the 1980s, many have noted the increased “literariness of anthropology” (Clifford, 1986, p. 4) and research writing in the other social sciences. Postmodern theorists have increasingly used “fiction to build a new field of ‘arts-based’ research that blurs the boundaries between the humanities and social sciences, and encourages more vivid, creative research writing” (Wild, 2007, p. 104). The edited collection by Banks & Banks, *Fiction and social research: By ice or fire* (1998), is an exemplary volume of 15 chapters which probe and explore the intersections between fiction and social research. The authors in the anthology:

[Use] short stories, ethnographic fictions, poems, plays, and other narrative forms...[to] experiment with modes of storytelling that consciously attempt to bridge the gaps between author and reader, between fact and truth, between cool reason and hot passion, between the personal and the collective, and between the drama of social life and the legitimized modes for representing it...[they] ask readers to contemplate new possibilities for social research, where the prose is poetically crafted, where the author is construed primarily as a writer rather than exclusively as a researcher, where the reader is invited into the subjective and emotional world of the author, where at least as much attention has been given to the imagination as to the rigor of the inquiry, and where the texts that depict social life have the sound and feel of lived reality, giving context to the lives and actions they details. (Bochner & Ellis, 1998, p. 7-8)

Not surprisingly, debates have also abounded regarding the boundaries between fiction and research, and the ethical responsibilities and obligations of authors to report, for example, when imaginative narrative is written or “composite cases...molded into a single story” (Denzin, 2003b, p. 466). Denzin (2003b) argues that, above all, the writer of ethnographic fiction “must be honest with the reader” (p. 466). In the narratives I have included in this thesis, I have drawn on fiction writing strategies such as “alternative points of view...third-person voice, and the omniscient narrator” (Richardson, 2003, p. 515). I make clear the few instances where my accounts extend beyond field notes and interview transcripts and into fictional territory.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>See Chapter 4, p. 161, on the fictional vignettes written in first-person voice in Pania’s story,

### Creative analytic practices

Richardson (2003) suggests that what all the new styles and modes of writing in the social sciences share in common is that “they are produced through *creative analytic practices* (CAP)” (p. 509). Her “‘sampling’ of the many ‘species’ of CAP ethnography” includes a list of one hundred citations, published primarily in the 1990s, in the categories of: Autoethnography, fiction-stories, poetry, drama, performance texts, polyvocal texts, readers’ theater, responsive readings, aphorisms, comedy and satire, visual presentation, allegory, conversation, layered accounts, writing-stories, and mixed genres (Richardson, 2003, p. 510-511). In addition, new journals,<sup>21</sup> edited collections,<sup>22</sup> and book series, such as Ellis & Bochner’s *Ethnographic Alternatives*, have emerged to publish experimental or alternative forms of qualitative writing over the past decade. As Denzin & Lincoln (2003) write: “Today, few in the interpretive community look back with skepticism on the narrative turn. The turn has been taken, and that is all there is to say about it” (p. x).

Readers will note my use of a number of “creative analytic practices” throughout this thesis. Keeping my focus broad for now though, I give particular consideration to an evocative style of writing known as narrative ethnography. After this, I make some final reflections on the ways I have attempted to merge my narrative writing with applied research to raise public and private consciousness about domestic violence in New Zealand.

### Narrative ethnography

Over the course of this research, I was increasingly drawn to ‘narrative ethnography’ with its goal “to tell a story” (McClusky, 2001, p. 14), but one which is always “subject to reconstruction and reinterpretation” (Hyden, 1994, p. 109). Building on McClusky’s example (see Part II), I tell several stories of boys and girls living with domestic violence in New Zealand in this thesis.

Narrative accounts of human action and intention have long preoccupied the

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and the multi-voiced narrative in Chapter 5 (pages 202 and 204), where Joshua’s perspective is fictional).

<sup>21</sup>For example, *Qualitative Research and Journal of Life History and Narrative*.

<sup>22</sup>Such as *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (1994; 2000) and *Qualitative Research Methods* (2005).

anthropologist's attention (see Campbell, 1956, and Rosaldo, 1986, for example), especially researchers concerned with "the social significance of myths, legends and tribal stories" (Propp, 1968; Young, 1987, cited in Gergen, 1988, p. 96). As far back as 1975, Geertz suggested that culture is constituted through "the ensemble of stories we tell about ourselves" (cited in Fraser, 2004, p. 180). However, 'stories' only moved centre stage significantly in social thought in the past two decades as accounts of human experience were increasingly seen as the outcomes of the "particular textual/cultural history in which people learn to tell stories of their lives to themselves and others" (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1027). Plummer (1995) notes that today stories are seen in anthropology as "the pathways to understanding culture. In psychology, they are the bases of identity. In history, they provide the tropes for making sense of the past. In psychoanalysis, they provide 'narrative truths' for analysis" (p. 18).

The particular appeal of narrative ethnography for me was its promise to overcome the problems of 'generalising accounts' of social life and human experience. According to Abu-Lughod (1991), generalisation was "the characteristic mode of operation and style of writing of the social sciences for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" (p. 149); it has certainly been the predominant style of domestic violence research. Generalisations have been critiqued, however, for feigning to be "neutral description" (Foucault, 1978; Said, 1978; Smith, 1987) and for "facilitating abstraction and reification" (Abu-Lughod, 1991, p. 149). In addition, "generalizations, by producing effects of timelessness and coherence to support the essentialized notions of 'cultures' different from ours and peoples separate from us, make us forget...[that] events take different courses. That is the nature of 'life as lived' (Reisman, 1977), everywhere" (Abu-Lughod, 1991, p. 156). Abu-Lughod (1991) argues strongly for "refusing to generalise in our writing," therefore, in order to show "the actual circumstances and detailed histories of individuals and their relationships...suggest[ing] that such particulars, which are always present (as we know from our own personal experiences), are also always crucial to the constitution of experience" (p. 152-153). Indeed, I focus on capturing the depth and nuanced complexities of children's experiences of domestic violence in New Zealand in this study, rather than making general conclusions about the impacts, effects, or outcomes of witnessing abuse.

Practically, narrative ethnography offers a number of advantages for my research

topic. Domestic violence is not available for first-hand study or observation; it literally occurs behind closed doors. As such, it is necessary to analyse *stories* of violence. In addition, my research participants—all children between 5 and 12 years old—seemed to be either ‘natural’ storytellers or at least familiar with story-telling. Adopting a narrative approach in my research and writing, therefore, was an effective way to engage the children comfortably in collaborative research activities and conversations and, later, represent their discourse. Including their extended narratives in this work also made it easier for me to avoid a common problem with research on children’s lives whereby adult interpretations are taken as children’s ‘truths.’ The children in my research speak largely for themselves.

Finally, narratives are humanising (Stewart, 1988). In the context of my research, they hold potential for ‘making human’ the experience of family violence. By extension, this approach offers an alternative to the many positivist and statistical analyses that exist in the literature and helps create “rich textured portraits of three-dimensional peoples” rather than dichotomising depictions of either “passive victims” or “active survivors” (Brass, 1997; Brown, 1992; Daniel, 1996; Dentan, 1995; 1997; 1999, cited in McClusky, 2001, p. 19).

### Writing for action

As I near the end of this chapter, let me summarise the theoretical influences and contextual details surveyed that bind my study together. First, I have located my work within the ‘ethnography of childhood’ movement in anthropology which views children as social actors (Part I). Next, my project is inspired by the shortcomings of domestic violence research in New Zealand, particularly the imperative to incorporate children’s voices and perspectives into literature, policy, and practice (Part II). Finally, my research is grounded in a commitment to qualitative, narrative ‘research-writing’ about lived, emotional experiences, and experimentation with literary form to best achieve this (Part III).

As I have mentioned before however, my study *also* aims to bring about practical changes for its participants and the Palmerston North Women’s Refuge. That is, I have approached my research as a means to social change or at least to achieving applied ends. As such, although my work is broadly anthropological, it is also in-

herently multi-disciplinary and action-oriented. For example, readers will recognise this thesis as anthropological in terms of how I have engaged with and applied the methods, resources, and writing of the discipline and, perhaps most of all, in *my orientation*—the ways I relate to and with my participants and the holistic concern and focus I have on the details and contexts of their lives. However, I have also drawn from the methodological and epistemological practices and resources of a variety of disciplines outside anthropology in my research and writing processes, and to make sense of the children’s narratives in the later chapters of this thesis. In addition, in order to ‘do’ activist research, I ‘write for action.’ I conclude this chapter with an explication of what this means to me, beginning with the compelling words of Laurel Richardson (2003):

We have a serious problem: Research topics are riveting and research valuable, but qualitative books are underread. Unlike quantitative work, which can be interpreted through its tables and summaries, qualitative work carries its meaning in its entire text. Just as a piece of literature is not equivalent to its “plot summary,” qualitative research is not contained in its abstracts. Qualitative research has to be read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading...Qualitative work could be reaching wide and diverse audiences, not just devotees of individual topics or authors. It seems foolish at best, and narcissistic and wholly self-absorbed at worst, to spend months or years doing research that ends up not being read and not making a difference to anything but the author’s career. Can something be done?...How do we create texts that are vital? That are attended to? That make a difference? (p. 501)

I propose that one way to create “vital” texts that “make a difference” is to present our writing, in Denzin and Lincoln’s (2003) example, as “critical, intimate, public ethnography” (p. 464-465). Narrative ethnographers write about the stories that matter to their participants (indeed this is why these accounts have been shared). It is very often the case that ‘private’ troubles are public issues (Charity, 1995); domestic violence being a key example. Narratives also have an inherent potential to ‘make an impact’ because they are (generally) accessible and engaging in contrast to traditional scientific research-writing. Where they are presented in moving or evocative ways, as stories that “feel the sting of memory” (Denzin, 2003b, p. 471), they can also be compelling. For example, they can grow moral compassion in readers, prompting

reflection that may stimulate public discourse (Charity, 1995; Denzin, 2003b). This is my ultimate intention with this thesis—to (re-)present my participant’s personal, intimate, emotional experiences in ways that will stimulate critical reflection, raising both public and private consciousness about domestic violence in New Zealand. The debates of the past three decades have made it strikingly clear that writing is never an innocent practice (Rinehart, 1998). At the risk of pretension, I write then, not only to interpret my participant’s worlds for readers, but to effect change.

## Chapter conclusions

Parts I and II of this chapter have located my study in temporal and geographic context and identified the significant gaps my work seeks to fill. Part III considered the paradigm-shifting debates in the social sciences since the 1980s that influenced the ways I present my data in the remaining chapters of this thesis. It also identified my commitment to writing for action or social change.

The next chapter, “Becoming an Engaged Anthropologist,” follows the course of my fieldwork in Palmerston North. In the process, it illuminates the various roles I played in this research, how I shaped the field, and how it shaped me. Chapter 3 also begins the process, continued in Chapters 4 and 5, of taking readers into the lives of children growing up with domestic violence in Aotearoa/New Zealand. While my research draws on experiences gained through work with 22 children in the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*, the thesis focuses on ‘key characters’—the individuals who participated in research interviews in addition to the group programme. These are also the individuals whom I got to know best, or whose stories I felt were most representative of other children’s experiences as well. I share the stories of Ben, Kerry, Jamie, Steven, and Olivia in Chapter 3, Pania in Chapter 4, and Joshua in Chapter 5.<sup>23</sup>

My desire is that these narratives will “engag[e] all of your senses” (Kiesinger, 1995, p. 60). I share Kiesinger’s (1995) hope that you “not only come to *know*, but to *feel* the particularities of my participant’s lives” (p. 61). Similarly, I present these narratives with Leslie Devereaux’s (1995) distinction between ‘looking’ and ‘seeing’

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<sup>23</sup>All names in this thesis are pseudonyms, except for my colleague’s name, Chantelle Potroz, from the Palmerston North Women’s Refuge.

firmly in mind: “‘Looking’ preserves the ontological separation of beings into viewers and viewed [while] ‘seeing’ begins the project of traversing the gap” (p. 70-71). I encourage readers to ‘traverse’ Devereaux’s ‘gap,’ to ‘see,’ to make this work your personal work too. Finally, if I might suggest a caveat for the following ethnographic chapters, it is: Do not mistake the snapshots for the whole. As I have discussed in this chapter, my focus is on the specificity of individual experience; thus, generalisations from the data in my thesis only defeat its purpose.



## Chapter 3

# Becoming an engaged anthropologist

*Being a child means learning a lot. That's what a child is really: Someone who learns. Someone who is growing up, learning new things each day. Oh, except for weekends, of course. No, wait—actually, children learn stuff on weekends too. When you watch a fight you can learn a lot too. You can see a lot: Swearing, spitting, yelling, screaming, punching, scratching, throwing plants, like my dad did. He did that. And, yeah, you can see all that. It does upset your stomach. Mum, she's said sorry to us kids, but 'he' hasn't. I'm getting over it now. It was when we moved from Dad, that I turned myself into a different person, and my life started getting better. And, at least one thing is good about the fighting: You get to know your neighbours. You can count on your neighbours. They will call the police, if Mum won't. If she can't.*

(9-year old girl)

## Recording the field

This extended chapter picks up where I left off in Chapter 1 with the establishment of my field site at the Palmerston North Women's Refuge and the start of the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*. I have written a four-act play titled *A Record of Fieldwork* to illuminate the many dimensions of my fieldwork process. Each act of the play represents a different context and phase of fieldwork; the different relationships I shared with research participants; and the different roles I played along the way. The play also illustrates the methods I incorporated into the research and writing of this thesis; their strengths and limitations; and how they address the gaps in research on children's lives identified in Chapter 2.<sup>1</sup> In addition, I discuss some of the ethical and practical challenges I confronted 'in the field,' as well as the host of surprises, joys, frustrations, delights, awkward and uncomfortable moments, and exchange of learning and ideas that took place in the *Dragonflies* group programme. Finally, I reflect on themes and directions emerging from the children's narratives in this chapter, weaving together process, interpretation, and voice using different literary strategies.

Before the play begins, I give consideration to my writing methods generally and to the process of writing as a means of discovery. I then discuss my motivations for choosing dramatic representation to address the methodological aspects of my research.

### Writing my way in: Writing methods

All researchers face the difficult challenge of deciding what to include in the final presentation of their 'data'—for example, which cases, stories, or data to highlight; according to what criteria; and in relation to which theories. Writing is far more than a creative process or technical skill; it is a crucial part of data analysis. Indeed, writing is a "way of knowing" (Richardson, 2003, p. 499). However, Laurel Richardson (2003) notes that students are still "taught to conceptualize writing as 'writing-up'...[as if it were a] mopping up activity at the end of a research project" (p. 499-502). In her view, it is more instructive to consider writing as a "method

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<sup>1</sup>Particularly, the lack of children's voices on the lived experience of domestic violence and a general lack of focus on children's agency, wisdom, resilience, and discourse.

of inquiry,” for this opens up its possibilities as a creative and dynamic terrain for self-discovery and for finding out more about one’s topic (Richardson, 2003, p. 502). I am partial to Richardson’s perspective based on my own experience where it was only through writing that I was able to truly make my way ‘in’ to my research, come to know my topic and data intimately, and navigate the course of the whole project’s unfolding.

Coming to know myself as a writer to construct this thesis, however, required abandoning many of the strategies I previously called ‘my own,’ having used them effectively for much shorter writing assignments throughout my academic career. Most notably, I was the kind of writer who laboured over the small details, especially in-process editing at the sentence level. Thus, even a short assignment could be a painstakingly slow process. To produce a doctoral thesis, I had to learn to “write out of my sel[f]” (Bolker, 1998, p. 5); basically, to give myself more freedom to play with words, experiment with styles, and—on occasion—simply let my writing ‘flow’ without editing. In turn, writing in different ways heightened my awareness of how “the *writing process* and the *writing product* [are] deeply intertwined” (Richardson, 2003, p. 511). As I experimented with textual form, voice, and reflexivity to construct the narratives in this thesis, I became increasingly conscious of how writers “word the world” into existence (Rose, 1992). Of course, as Richardson (2003) notes “this ‘worded world’ never accurately, precisely, completely captures the studied world, yet we persist in trying” (p. 500). Throughout this thesis, I share my writing methods to clarify the ways I have tried to capture my participants’ realities.

I moved into the more concerted writing phase of this research in late 2006, when I first systematically confronted the enormous pile of transcripts, fieldnotes, and artwork I had collected over the course of my fieldwork. As I demonstrate in this chapter, I found my way into my participants’ lives by facilitating a context in the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* and, later, the research interviews, where they freely shared their stories with me. I wanted my writing to give shape, meaning, and a sense of coherence to the huge variety of accounts this data presented. I also desired to communicate my participants’ stories in ways that would assist readers to “step into the space of vicarious experience, to assume a position in the world of the research—to live the lived experience along with [me], the researcher” (Ely et al., 1997, p. 72).

The first stage of this process, I decided at the time, was to read through my data comprehensively, highlighting the main points; considering the words my participants had chosen and what they might signify; seeking out gaps, contradictions, and common themes. I made notes on the style and tone of the interviews, the long pauses, silences, or other interruptions in the transcripts, and I considered whether these might indicate boredom, distress, disagreement, confusion, or anything else (Fraser, 2004). Next, I sorted the material “into specific stories or segments of narrative” (Fraser, 2004, p. 195). In this process, I realised I had gathered two types of data in particular: First, detailed and nuanced life stories, such as Olivia’s (Act IV of this chapter) and Pania’s (Chapter 4). Secondly, my data presented a large number of sparser accounts, some which did not make it into the final presentation of this work,<sup>2</sup> but including Kerry’s, Ben’s, and Jamie’s stories which are incorporated in the play in this chapter. These shorter narratives read like fragmented ‘accounts of life’ to me, rather than ‘life stories,’ because they lacked contextual detail, emotional depth, and/or temporal coherence. At the same time, though, I felt that many of these experiences were still essential to include in this work because of their poignant enormity in my participant’s lives. In other words, the stories were shared with me because, in their tellers’ (my participants’) views, they are *essential* to understanding their lives.

Thus, I experimented with modes of literary representation to best “tell and retell” the lives of my participants, as I understood them *and* as they had been described to me (Ellis, 1995; Richardson, 2003). Ultimately, I chose to use vignettes to highlight particular issues encountered during my fieldwork; to introduce research participants; and to show what I learned from and about a particular participant over the course of our relationship (Ely et al., 1997). I follow Richardson’s (1992) example in Chapter 4, where I present a descriptive poem of one participant’s emotional experience of witnessing a family fight. The use of poetic form here honours my participant’s “pauses and repetitions more effectively than standard prose” (Richardson, 1992, p. 522). In Chapter 5, for Joshua’s story, I experiment with textual collage, fiction, and multiple voicing, to integrate the potpourri of materials I gathered using

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<sup>2</sup>The epigraphs that begin Chapters 3–5 of this thesis come from the fragmented accounts I refer to, children’s stories I have not written about in more detail because I lack a good understanding of their lives.

different research methods with him, including drawing, journal writing, worksheets, group and individual discussions. The remainder of *this* chapter incorporates various techniques of dramatic representation. The four acts of the play, *A Record of Fieldwork*, differ in form and content. Act I documents the processes involved in the initial assessment interviews for the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*; Act II re-creates a group session of the programme. Acts III and IV present my follow-up interviews with two research participants, Steven and Olivia Richards, as dialogue and monologue.

## Writing performance

Writing the chapter as a play seemed to be the most appropriate way to represent experiences that felt performative to me, rather than natural or embodied, especially at the beginning. For example, during the first few interviews and group sessions of the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*, I was highly conscious of the way I spoke, the words I chose, the environment I created and, of course, the mistakes I made. Many of these experiences were entirely new for me; such as, being responsible for picking up children from their schools, meeting their teachers, introducing myself as both a children's advocate and a researcher, providing structure in a group setting, and thinking of strategies to keep all of the children—with their different personalities, interests, and life experiences—engaged in group activities. Indeed, I had to learn how to act or 'perform' my role as a domestic violence programme facilitator.

In addition, it has been argued that culture is always being enacted or performed (Branaman, 1997; Goffman, 1959; Jackson, 1998; Turner, 1986). Allison James (1999) captures my own experience of this with the *Dragonflies* groups in her chapter on fieldwork amongst English school children in the Midlands for the edited book, *Being there: Fieldwork in anthropology*. She (1999) writes:

The tale I shall tell reveals how, as I watched and listened to the children interacting with one another and with me, they literally enacted for me (and for each other) some of the structuring processes through which the culture of childhood is given form and meaning. For all of us, therefore, the incidents I describe here were educative, providing a lesson in 'practical mastery' for the children and one in 'symbolic mastery' for me (Bourdieu 1977). (p. 99)

I, too, was educated during my fieldwork to recognise and respond to children's cues and to the demands of "ensemble performance"—the interactions of individuals in a group programme (Watson, 1999, p. 6).

Writing a 'presentational text' (a play) also felt like the most potent way to show children's unique language and dialogue, "its rhythm, syntax, and semantics" (Denzin, 2003b, p. 484). Paradoxically, perhaps, the format was equally effective for representing the significant amount of non-verbal communication that took place in the *Dragonflies* groups because of the addition of stage directions indicating silent actions. Following Conquergood (1985), I attempt to represent children's voices and agency in *A Record of Fieldwork* in a way that does more than "turn the 'other' into the object of a voyeuristic, fetishistic, custodial, or paternalistic gaze" (cited in Denzin, 2003b, p. 469). I write about 'real' people and 'real' lives, not research subjects.

Finally, a structural note on the format of the play: I have interspersed the four acts of *A Record of Fieldwork* with short 'audience briefings' (preparatory information) and summary reflections that draw out themes from the acts for discussion. Thus, I continually shift between dramatic presentation and analysis; these changes in literary style, mode, and voice are intended to be helpful and engaging for readers. There is also an 'interval' between Acts II and III which marks a transition from the group programme to the final research conversations and a noticeable shift in my role from community worker to academic researcher.

Now, I present the play asking readers, as 'viewers,' "to move through the re-created experience with me, the writer and a co-performer" (Denzin, 2003b, p. 471).

## A Record of Fieldwork: A Play in Four Acts

### PERSONAE

(In Order of Appearance)

CHANTELLE POTROZ: Co-facilitator of the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* and Children's Advocate at the Palmerston North Women's Refuge.

JENNIFER INFANTI: Co-facilitator of the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* and anthropology student conducting research on children's experiences of family violence in New Zealand.

SHANNON RICHARDS: Aunt of Olivia and Steven Richards.

OLIVIA RICHARDS: 9-year-old niece of Shannon Richards.<sup>3</sup>

STEVEN RICHARDS: 7-year-old brother of Olivia Richards, nephew of Shannon Richards.

JAMIE ANDERSON: 7-year-old boy with Protection Order<sup>4</sup> against father.

KERRY ANDERSON: 9-year-old sister of Jamie Anderson, also with Protection Order against father.

BEN MOORE: 7-year-old boy with Protection Order against step-father.

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<sup>3</sup>Age when 'character' first appears in the play.

<sup>4</sup>In New Zealand, Protection Orders are issued to a victim of domestic violence (and his or her children) upon application to the Family Court under the Domestic Violence Act 1995. "A Protection Order is directed at the perpetrator of violence and states that they must not use physical, psychological or sexual violence; damage or threaten to damage property; or encourage others to abuse the victim(s)" (<http://www.nzfvc.org.nz/Glossary.aspx>). Many children attending the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* fell under their mother's Protection Orders. The children were referred to the *Dragonflies* programme by the Ministry of Justice when the Order was served.

### Audience Briefing: Act I

*A Record of Fieldwork* opens with Act I: The Assessment Interview which represents the processes involved in the initial assessments for the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* and the first stage of relationship-building with the children who eventually became my research participants. Prior to the specific interview enacted in Act I, the children—Olivia and Steven—were referred to the Palmerston North Women’s Refuge by a local school social worker working with them at their Auntie Shannon’s request. Olivia and Steven had recently moved to Shannon’s house because of the fighting at home between their mother and father. Chantelle and I met with Shannon one week prior to the interview to discuss the content, philosophy, and goals of the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* and the children’s potential suitability and interest in attending. This is the general process we followed after receiving referrals to the programme.

The applied nature of my research is particularly evident in this act of the play; I am clearly not engaged in traditional participant-observation. Rather, the primary role I ‘perform’ is as a community worker and programme facilitator for the Palmerston North Women’s Refuge. Act I also brings to light some of the ethical considerations and issues unique to my field site; I discuss the efforts I took to address and resolve these issues in the summary reflections.

## Act I: The Assessment Interview

SCENE I: *The front door of OLIVIA and STEVEN's house, a Tuesday, 8:30 am.*

(CHANTELLE and JEN ring the door bell and wait anxiously outside for a few seconds. SHANNON opens the door and welcomes JEN and CHANTELLE into her home, embracing them like old friends. Two children, OLIVIA and STEVEN, peek around the corner at the entranceway, from the kitchen. They approach JEN and CHANTELLE tentatively, but with big smiles and curious eyes. STEVEN nibbles his fingernails).

OLIVIA: (*Smiles shyly*) Hello. I'm Olivia Richards.

JEN: (*Smiles and extends her hand to shake OLIVIA's*) Hi Olivia. Nice to meet you. I'm Jen and this is Chantelle.

CHANTELLE: (*Extends her hand to shake OLIVIA's and speaks in a funny British accent*) How d'you do, Olivia?

OLIVIA: (*Giggles and replies cutely*) Gooood. (*Giggles again*).

JEN: (*Turns to look at STEVEN who is standing confidently now with his hands on his hips*) And you must be Steven?

STEVEN: (*Speaks clearly*) Yes. I'm Steven. Olivia is my brother—I mean, sister. (*Sounds annoyed at his mistake*) Sister! Tyrell is my brother, but he's in the other room. He's not doing this.

JEN: Oh, okay. How come he doesn't want to do the interview?

OLIVIA: (*Interrupts STEVEN. Mockingly*) He thinks he's toooooo cool and too old for it. He's e-level.

(CHANTELLE *laughs at OLIVIA's sarcastic voice*).

JEN: (*Laughs too*) Ahh, okay, I see. Well, that's okay, isn't it? Now it will just be two of us and two of you.

SHANNON: (*Watching the conversation unfold, suddenly claps her hands together loudly*) Okay, kids, why don't you show Jennifer and Chantelle to the lounge so you's can get started with yer business.

JEN: (*Aside, to herself*) What a relief! I think it's going to be fine. The kids seem great already—really friendly, not shy at all. Shannon is quite intimidating though—a lot different from our last meeting with her. She seemed more vulnerable then, or something like that. I guess it was probably a little uncomfortable for her to ask for our help. Now she seems very authoritative. It feels like she is going to try to dictate the way our relationships unfold with the children.

SCENE II: *The Richards' kitchen, about 20 minutes later.*<sup>5</sup>

(JEN, CHANTELLE, OLIVIA and STEVEN sit around a kitchen table with hot drinks and a plate of assorted chocolate biscuits. The children look relaxed and enthusiastic about the interview now. CHANTELLE sips her hot tea and talks casually to the kids about their school and favourite activities. JEN sorts through various pieces of paper spread in front of her on the table—consent forms, school contact forms, programme brochures, interview question forms. Meanwhile, SHANNON is in the kitchen, sitting on a high bar stool and occasionally talking to her husband who is making toast. She flips through a newspaper. She is far enough away to create an illusory sense of privacy for the kids but occasionally glances at the table where the conversation begins<sup>6</sup>).

JEN: (*Hands CHANTELLE a second copy of the interview questions,*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>In the period between introductions and the formal assessment interview and, in fact, whenever we met caregivers or children for the first time to talk about the *Dragonflies Programme*, we always explained our responsibilities as employees of the Palmerston North Women's Refuge to maintain the children's confidentiality in the groups at all times except where we had concerns about the children's safety, as in the case of ongoing (or current) abuse, for example.

<sup>6</sup>Caregivers were often present during the initial assessment interviews for the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*, but never during the follow-up interviews upon the programme's completion. Chantelle and I always gave the children the choice to have their mothers (or caregivers) in the room during the initial interviews. On a few occasions though, as in the instance described in the play, the caregivers themselves asked to remain in the room or nearby.

<sup>7</sup>The interview represented in Act I does not include all of the questions required by the Ministry of Justice for the initial programme assessments.

*apologetically*). Sorry, you guys, that it's taking so long for us to get organised. This is one of our first interviews actually. We are just starting this programme. Did your auntie tell you that?

OLIVIA: (*Eyes widen*) Really? (*Exclaims*) Oh, cool! So we can help you too? We can help you learn how to do the programme?

JEN: (*Nods with surprise at OLIVIA's enthusiasm*) Yep. Yes, definitely. That would be great. We would love to get your feedback on the programme so we can make it better for the next group of kids.

STEVEN: (*Looks curious*) You mean, other kids are going in the *Dragonflies* too?

CHANTELLE: Yep. There are going to be three boys and two girls in your group for this school term, including you and your sister. Then, next school term, we'll have some different kids in the group.

OLIVIA: But we can come back again to the group if we like it, right?

JEN: Hmm, oh. (*Looks a little perplexed*) I don't know. (*Pauses*) Well, actually, I don't think so because we'll have to make space for other kids who have fighting in their families too and want to come to the group.

STEVEN: (*Matter-of-factly*) My mum and dad fight—

OLIVIA: (*Interrupts her brother*) Yeah, we know a-LOT about fighting from Mum and Dad actually.

(SHANNON *raises her eyebrows from her perch on the kitchen stool*).

OLIVIA: And my uncle punches and kicks my other auntie sometimes. And (*voice lowers*), one time I was bringing in a towel and he was strangling her.

CHANTELLE: (*Sympathetically*) Oh no.

JEN: That sounds really scary.

OLIVIA: (*Sincerely*) It was.

CHANTELLE: What do you do when you see fighting like that?

STEVEN and OLIVIA: (*Almost simultaneously*) Tell Auntie.

JEN: And she helps you?

OLIVIA: (*Confidently*) Yeah, she's the one who helps the most with everything. Everyone in our family respects her and listens to her actually.

STEVEN: We can always get help from her. (*Pauses*) And sometimes my uncle helps me too cuz he plays with me. We play fight. He's just joking around.

JEN: Oh yeah. So, um, how does it feel when you see your mum and dad fighting?

STEVEN: I get a shock. I get worried Mum will get hurt.

OLIVIA: I just feel really really scared and sad. We feel bad for Mum. We help each other when we're crying. One time I wanted to get a hug from my big brother, but—(*Pauses. Shyly*) Well, then, I didn't really want a hug from *him*, I just felt I needed a hug. I got one from Auntie.

CHANTELLE: (*Nods understandingly*) Why do you think they fight anyway?

OLIVIA: (*Matter-of-factly*) Because Uncle's violent. He has a disease. He didn't get brought up properly.

JEN: (*Thoughtfully*) Mmmm. Yeah, mmm. What do you think Steven? Do you know why some people in your family fight? What about your dad?

STEVEN: (*Wrinkles his eyebrows, appears to be thinking hard*) I do *not* know actually. Cuz they're angry, I think. And sometimes they are fighting about the kids because they are always talking about me.

CHANTELLE: Oh, but you know that even if they fight about the kids, it's never your fault, right?

OLIVIA: Well Auntie says that, but sometimes it is our fault. Because they do actually talk about us *heaps* when they fight.

JEN: Yeah, parents often fight about their kids, but still it's not the kid's fault ever cuz the adults should know how to handle their disagreements in a way that

doesn't lead to a fight. You know?

OLIVIA: (*Nods*) Yeah. Yeah, I guess. They *are* grown-ups after all.

CHANTELLE: Well, how about we ask a few questions about your school and friends now? Is that okay?

OLIVIA: Yep, yep.

JEN: Okay. (*Pauses, flips through papers, clears her throat*) So what do you like best about your school?

STEVEN: You get to have fun and use the computer. I like to play on the computer in Room 4.

OLIVIA: Mmm, I think art and 'Interval.' I don't really like maths, or sitting on the mat.

STEVEN: (*Jumps in*) I don't like detentions. I *always* get detentions. It's so boring. (*Exclaims*) You have to look at the door!

CHANTELLE: How come you get detentions, Steven?

STEVEN: Being naughty.

Jen: (*Smiles a little, curiously*) Oh? How so?

STEVEN: Getting in fights. Cuz sometimes kids at school come and get me to help them get stuff, like their ball back, from other groups. Cuz I can get that stuff. (*Pauses*) I get in a scrap.

JEN: And then you get in trouble?

STEVEN: (*Shrugs*) Not really.

OLIVIA: When I get mad at my friends, I just walk away. (*Looks at STEVEN with glaring eyes*) At least *I'm* not mean.

JEN: Mmm. Do you get mad at your friends ever, Steven?

STEVEN: Sometimes.

JEN: What do you do then?

STEVEN: Just kick them. Or walk away.

OLIVIA: (*Voice resentful. Looks at her brother*) Yeah, and sometimes he kicks *me* too. (*Eyes narrow at STEVEN*) Or he hits me.

CHANTELLE: (*Looks at STEVEN*) You do?

STEVEN: (*Hangs his head a little*) Sometimes I get really angry.

JEN: (*Talks directly to STEVEN*) Oh, um, well maybe next time you get really angry at Olivia you could try something else like even punching that foot stool over there (*points to soft vinyl stool*) instead of punching your sister. Or something like that anyway so you don't hurt anybody, even yourself. What do you think? Have you tried that already?

STEVEN: (*Wrinkles his eyebrows*) Maybe. (*Pauses, then sincerely*) I'd have to punch it really, really hard.

CHANTELLE: Well, I guess you could always give it a try, as long as you don't damage the stool. Then your sister wouldn't get hurt.

OLIVIA: (*Smiles and nods*) Mmmm.

CHANTELLE: Okay, well, let's talk about a few of your feelings quickly, if that's alright with you guys?

OLIVIA and STEVEN: (*Nod*) Yep.

CHANTELLE: Okay, what's the saddest thing that's happened to you?

STEVEN: When Nana died.

OLIVIA: When Uncle gets mad and violent.

JEN: Oh, yes (*nods*). Both of those things sound really sad. (*Pauses*) And how about scary times? What's the scariest thing that's happened to you guys? Ste—

OLIVIA: (*Interrupts*) What Pops did. (*Looks at SHANNON, who appears involved*)

*in a newspaper. Voice hushed*) Touching me. He upset my life a bit because he touched me. (*Pauses*) And he used to hurt Nana too.

JEN: (*Aside, to herself*) Oh... what? I didn't expect that at all. Should I ask for more details? What exactly does she mean by "touching?" She must mean sexual touching, right? I mean, she basically whispered it, and looked at Shannon like she shouldn't be talking about it, or at least like Shannon wouldn't be happy to know she was sharing this information with us. If we ask anything else, Shannon might get involved. I don't know. What if nothing has happened about it?

JEN: (*To OLIVIA, with concern on her face*) Is he still in your life, your Pops?

OLIVIA: I don't see him anymore. Auntie won't let him come here or anywhere near me.<sup>8</sup>

CHANTELLE: (*Looks relieved*) Oh, I'm glad to hear that. How awful for you.

OLIVIA: Yeah, but I'm getting over it now.

JEN: You must be pretty strong.

OLIVIA: (*Smiles widely*) I am.

JEN: (*Aside, to herself*) Well, if we're going to ask anything else, we better do it now. She's just steered the conversation in a more positive direction. I guess we don't need to ask anything else right now; we're not conducting an investigation. We don't need all the details. I can't believe they are sharing everything so freely like this. I wonder if we've made them feel comfortable or if they are always like this... just really open kids?

JEN: (*To STEVEN, stammers a little*) Oh, um, Steven. How about you? What's the saddest thing that's happened to you that you feel like sharing with us?

STEVEN: (*Anxious to speak*) Sometimes my brother is mean to me. He punches me and holds me down in a choke hold.

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<sup>8</sup>The majority of the details of our conversation about Olivia's experience of sexual abuse have been omitted here. See my reflections on Act I for a brief discussion about the editing decisions made and their implications.

CHANTELLE: What do you do then?

STEVEN: Just cry. (*Pauses*) My brother never cries. He never gets hurt.

JEN: He doesn't? Never?

STEVEN: (*Proudly*) No, cuz he's really strong. (*Laughs*) I mean, he's kinda a small fella but he's got big muscles, of course.

OLIVIA: (*Looks at her brother*) And you tell Auntie too.

STEVEN: Yeah, I tell Auntie. I try to tell Mum sometimes, but she doesn't listen. . .

*(Conversation continues for another ten minutes, focusing on the children's social relationships and activities, and ending with STEVEN and OLIVIA asking a few questions about the Dragonflies Programme and JEN and CHANTELLE personally).*

SCENE III: JEN's car, RICHARDS' driveway, immediately following the interview.

*(JEN fumbles with her keys, searching for the car's ignition. CHANTELLE looks agitated; her feet tap nervously).*

CHANTELLE: (*With a sense of urgency*) Jen, drive the car. Just drive, before I say anything.

*(JEN finally turns the key and backs out the driveway. Waves goodbye to SHANNON who is still standing outside her front door).*

CHANTELLE: (*Breathes a long sigh of relief*) They were lovely. The kids, I mean. But, ahhh—the sexual abuse. I wasn't prepared for that conversation.

JEN: I know, I know. Me neither.

CHANTELLE: Did you understand if her Pops was prosecuted? Did you get that impression? I was a bit unclear about it. It sounded really messy, the family's reaction to everything. I didn't know what to say or how to react. I mean, I guess

we didn't look shocked. It must have seemed like we could handle it.

JEN: Yeah. (*Sounds thoughtful*) Yeah. I didn't want to pry too much since Olivia was sharing everything so comfortably. I didn't want it to seem like an investigation; just more like we were listening, it wasn't too shocking, the house wasn't going to fall down or anything... (*voice trails off*).

CHANTELLE: Yeah. It was clear when she said "touching" she was talking about something different than physical abuse—that was what she called kicking, punching, and strangling. And she basically whispered it too, like she knew Shannon wouldn't be happy with her sharing the family secrets.

JEN: Yeah. Do you think we should follow up on it? Like, make sure it isn't ongoing, or just make sure *something* has been done about it?

CHANTELLE: Yeah, maybe we should talk to Shannon. But it doesn't sound like it's ongoing. Shannon doesn't let "Pops" in the house and Olivia said she's getting over it.

JEN: Yeah. I think we have to check into it though, in order to be accountable. I mean, we told the kids before we started the interview that we'd keep everything confidential *unless* we were worried about their safety. I think I'm worried. I feel worried anyway. My stomach is really tight. (*Exclaims*) Oh, I hate stories like that! It's just not fair to Olivia if "Pops" isn't prosecuted, and it's such a bad precedent for both of them if his behaviour just goes unpunished. Don't you think?

CHANTELLE: Yes. Yeah, of course. But they may have already put something in place to contain the situation, you know? I mean, maybe they *are* prosecuting him already. Or perhaps they thought it would be more dangerous to prosecute. The most important thing is keeping the kids safe, right?<sup>9</sup>

JEN: Mmm, yeah. Yeah.

(JEN and CHANTELLE drive to the children's school to meet office staff and teachers and give them the signed consent forms for OLIVIA and STEVEN to

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<sup>9</sup>Chantelle and I *did* follow up our concerns about Olivia's safety immediately after the interview and discovered she was safe. A criminal investigation was conducted over the time we knew Olivia.

*attend the programme).*

## Reflections: Act I

As noted in Chapter 1, the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* is based on a model originally created by the Māori Women's Refuge in Dunedin, *Te Whare Pounamu*, and later adapted for standardised use by Refuges across New Zealand by the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR). The initial stage of assessment illustrated in Act I, followed a format approved by the Ministry of Justice in New Zealand for the NCIWR programme. Chantelle and I always began the process with a general explanation of our group programme, the intake procedure, issues related to the children's confidentiality, and our responsibilities to report any concerns about a child's safety to Child, Youth and Family Services or other appropriate organisations in New Zealand. Next, as shown in Act I, we led the children through a series of simple questions about their schools, interpersonal relationships with friends and family, self-concept, feeling states, the violence they had witnessed in their families, and some fun fantasy questions.<sup>10</sup>

In general, the interviews took approximately one hour. Chantelle and I rotated the responsibilities of asking the questions and recording the children's responses on the interview forms. Sometimes, as in Act I, we both asked the questions. I was initially dissatisfied with the conversations that stemmed from the interview form; they often felt contrived and didn't necessarily, or even usually, flow naturally. The question sheet also did not allow us to garner any of the rich, contextual details I expected and desired from an interview. I eventually came to realise, however, that the initial interviews were effective for building rapport and gaining a very general understanding of a child's realities prior to getting to know him or her much better individually throughout the group programme. The purpose of the initial interviews was primarily to establish a relationship, however superficial, between myself and Chantelle, as the programme facilitators, and the group participants. We tried to create a sense of fun in the interviews, but also made sure the children knew the group was specifically about the violence they had experienced. We also wanted to ensure that the children felt they had some choice (ideally, the ultimate choice) about attending the programme.

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<sup>10</sup>For example, "If you could be animal, what would it be?" or "If you could have any three wishes, what would they be?"

The interview in Act I represents one of the first we held for the *Dragonflies Programme* in Palmerston North. It was also the first time after submitting my final application to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee in January 2005 that I recall giving serious *practical* consideration to the ethical implications of this research, especially the potential sensitivity of the data. Indeed, the act illustrates some of the ethical issues contingent on the kind of applied fieldwork I carried out in this study. In particular, Olivia's disclosure of sexual abuse during the interview gave rise to a number of considerations.

Olivia and her Auntie Shannon had signed research consent forms granting me permission to write about the interview, but Olivia later requested that I not include "all the details" of her sexual abuse in this thesis. At that time, I explored further with Olivia about the exact details she was comfortable with me writing. We came to the understanding that readers could know her grandfather had "touched her," it had really "upset her life" at the time, but she had been able to "move on" because she was "a strong person." It was clear to me then, however, that I would need to give constant consideration to the content I could responsibly include in the children's narratives as I constructed this thesis. My goals have been twofold in this respect: First, to preserve the integrity and identities of my participants at all times, but also to accurately represent their stories.

Olivia's disclosure was not isolated amongst research participants either. A number of children shared stories of sexual abuse, suicides in their families, incest, and open criminal investigations, for example—all important details, I felt, for framing and understanding their overall life experiences. Most of the participants agreed that these events were pivotal in their lives but, again, they did not necessarily want to share all of the details with unknown readers of this thesis, even if their identities remained anonymous. Again, I realised the potentially vulnerable position my participants were in as, theoretically, the ethics of my research could become whatever was most convenient for me (Morrow and Richards, 1996). The most effective strategy I found to address this concern was teaching my participants how to use the digital voice recorder during our conversations so they could make editing decisions along the way. This proved quite successful as the children regularly turned off the recorders during our conversations when they wanted to speak freely without concern about seeing their words later in print. I was occasionally disappointed that I would

be unable to write about the stories my participants told me while the recorder was stopped but, at the same time, I appreciated that the children were exercising their agency in making editing decisions and were comfortable enough with me to do this without concern of reprisal.

In addition, it seems important to note here that collaborating with the Palmerston North Women's Refuge added another level of safety for the participants in this research. My involvement with the organisation helped me develop a network of contacts, locally and nationally, in counselling, advocacy, and support work with women and children, in the event that any of the children should experience emotional discomfort as a result of their participation in the project. As well, Appendix B contains the research information sheets for this project and, Appendix C, the accompanying consent forms. Both of these documents were discussed in two stages with participant children and their legal guardians: First, before the commencement of the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* and, secondly, upon completion of the group programme and before the research interviews. These discussions were important opportunities to make clear my responsibilities to Massey University's Human Ethics Committee and the research community. They also coincided with discussions about the consent forms for the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* required by the Palmerston North Women's Refuge and New Zealand's Ministry of Justice, thereby ensuring both children and caregivers were well-informed of my additional professional obligations to report any potential concerns I might have about the ongoing safety of my research participants to appropriate institutions in New Zealand, including the Police and/or Child, Youth and Family Services.

The next act of the play moves ahead in time, approximately six weeks, to the mid-way point of the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*. I continue to play the role of community worker and programme facilitator in Act II, but readers will see how the children in the group programme begin to assign me their own roles (for example, as a helper, teacher, and/or friend) as our relationships evolve and trust develops.

## Audience Briefing: Act II

Each of the six groups of the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* that I facilitated between October 2005 and October 2006 was entirely unique. The combination of children's personalities, ages, and life experiences made an enormous difference to how much the groups learned overall, as well as the activities that were most effective and most enjoyed. Act II was constructed from the extensive field notes I took following each session of the programme.<sup>11</sup> It recreates the mood and atmosphere of a group session, illustrating the variety of methods we used: *Karakias*,<sup>12</sup> group discussions, story-reading, workbook questions, and drawing. Act II also points to the relative effectiveness of these research methods for different participants in the programme.

It is in this act of *A Record of Fieldwork* that the value of writing a play to represent my research methodology is most evident. The 'dramatic text' is effective for showing how the children interacted with each other in the group environment, as well as how they related to Chantelle and me (and us to them). The play also demonstrates children's agency in making sense of the violence they experienced in their lives in relation to each other, and represents children's unique dialogue, vocabularly, and idioms. Ideally, the style of writing aims to be absorbing, helping readers to imagine themselves in the group.

At the end of Act II, I give consideration (in the reflections section) to the advantages and disadvantages of the group setting as a 'field' environment, discussing the ways in which the children in the play individually and variously acted and responded to and in this context.

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<sup>11</sup>Slight changes have been made to the details in order to protect my participants' identities.

<sup>12</sup>Incantations, prayers, or chants in Māori culture, often invoked to ensure a favourable outcome to important meetings or used as formal greetings when beginning ceremonies. See, for example, <http://www.teara.govt.nz/EarthSeaAndSky/HarvestingTheSea/TeHiikaMaoriFishing/3/en>, for additional clarification.

## Act II: Week 5 of the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*

SCENE I: STEVEN and OLIVIA's school, a Monday, 2:45 pm.

(JEN, OLIVIA and STEVEN exit a school building. STEVEN runs ahead to JEN's car and pulls at the door handle, looking anxious to get inside. JEN opens the doors and everyone climbs in. OLIVIA sits in the back seat and STEVEN in the front passenger seat).

STEVEN: (*Putting his seat belt on, looks at JEN*) What do we have to drink today? I am sooooo thirsty.

JEN: (*Looks at the back seat, checking that OLIVIA has put her seat belt on too, then turns the key to start the car*) Um, we've got some orange-mango juice at the playroom, I think.

STEVEN: (*Sighs happily*) Oh, good! Phew. I'm so thirsty because my brain is really ticking. We did the hardest word search. It had words harder than 'Czechoslovakia' in it.

JEN: Wow. That *is* hard! Could you spell it?

STEVEN: No, not yet. I have to practice it.

OLIVIA: We do word searches all the time Jennifer. And do you know what? (*Leans forward*).

JEN: No, what? Tell me.

OLIVIA: (*Sighs happily*) I'm in maths club now too!

JEN: Maths club? What's that?

OLIVIA: We solve hard sums and stuff. Cuz you know I'm also in peer mediating and chess club and kapa haka<sup>13</sup> club (*pauses*). Oh, and choir, of course! Oh, and

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<sup>13</sup>Kapa haka is a traditional Māori performance art form that is unique to New Zealand. It includes haka (posture dance), poi (dance accompanied by song and rhythmic movements of the

student council (*sighs with exasperation*).

JEN: Whoa! That's heaps of activities. Do you feel *too* busy sometimes?

OLIVIA: Nah, I never feel too busy. I looovvve being busy. Oh, can I read Charlie and the Chocolate Factory to you now? We are reading it in class. I know my little brother likes it. I read it to him.

JEN: (*Glances at STEVEN*) I'd like to hear it, Olivia. I love that book. But is that okay with you, Steven? Are you happy to listen to the book now?

STEVEN: (*Looks at JEN*) Yeah, my sister reads it to me. We're at that part where Charlie is—No... um... where are we at again Olivia?

OLIVIA: (*Opens the book and flips to the first page*) I'll start at the beginning for Jennifer. Chapter 1 is called "Here Comes Charlie." There's a picture of two old people and it says (*starts reading from book*), "These two very old people are the father and mother of Mr. Bucket. Their names are Grandpa Joe and Grandma Josephine..."

(*OLIVIA reads two chapters of the book, quickly and easily, with a lot of expression on the drive to the next school*).

SCENE II: KERRY and JAMIE's school, 3:00 pm.

JEN: (*Parks the car*) Yikes, we're almost late. The bell may have gone already. Let's run to Jamie's classroom. I hope he's still there.

STEVEN: (*Slams his door and sprints off quickly in his bare feet*) I'll find him.

(*JEN and OLIVIA run after STEVEN and arrive at JAMIE's classroom door to find him searching through a huge pile of shoes for the second of his pair*).

JEN: (*Cheerfully*) Hi Jamie. How are you? Sorry we're a bit late.

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poi, a light ball on a string) waiata-ā-ringa (action songs) and waiata koroua (traditional chants). It has undergone a revival and there are kapa haka groups in many schools, tertiary education institutions and workplaces" (<http://www.teara.govt.nz/NewZealandInBrief/CreativeLife/8/en>).

JAMIE: (*Looks at JEN, then OLIVIA. Shrugs his shoulders and mutters*) Mmm.

(*JAMIE picks up his shoe but doesn't put it on. He starts walking quickly towards his sister's classroom. STEVEN, JEN and OLIVIA follow*).

KERRY: (*Sits on a bench outside her classroom door, shoes on and backpack in her hands. Sees everyone and jumps up*) Hi.

JEN: Hey Kerry. Sorry we're late. (*Pauses*). Did you have a good day?

KERRY: Yep. (*Indignantly*) Jamie's in the front today.

OLIVIA: But that's not right. He had it last time from here.

KERRY: Jamie and I already decided it was his turn in the front. You just had it coming here.

OLIVIA: No, I didn't. Steven did.

JEN: (*Interrupts*) Okay, we alwaaaays have trouble like this about the front seat, don't we?

OLIVIA: (*Matter-of-factly*) Yes we do.

JEN: I think we need a roster. How about Steven has the front from his school to this school, then Jamie can have it from here to the playroom. Kerry can have it from the playroom to her house. Olivia can have it from Kerry's house to her house. What do you think? It will be the same every week. Is that fair?

KERRY: (*Looks thoughtful, then smiles*) Mmm, yep. That's good. So Jamie has it now. (*Yells at her brother*) Jaaaaamie. You've got the front.

JAMIE: (*Shrugs casually*) Okay.

SCENE III: BEN's school, about 5 minutes later.

(*JEN stops the car outside BEN's school office. Seconds later, BEN runs out the doors with a huge smile on his face, waving furiously at the car. BEN gets into the*

*car and starts to bounce up and down in his seat).*

JEN: (*Turns around from the front seat to look directly at BEN*) Hello there, Benjamin. How's it goin'?

JAMIE: (*Interrupts with a serious expression on his face*) Why do you *always* smile like that when we pick you up?

KERRY: (*Exclaims*) Jamie, that's rude!

BEN: (*Silly grin on his face. Shrugs*) I like smiling. (*Bounces again in his seat*).

JAMIE: Do you have your folder?

BEN: Of course. (*Puts his seatbelt on*).

SCENE IV: *At the playroom,<sup>14</sup> 20 minutes later.*

JEN: (*Parks and turns off the car*) Okay, we're here.

BEN: (*Takes off his seatbelt*) Why are there so many new cars here? Why are there always so many new people at the house?

JEN: (*Gets out of the car*) Hmm, yeah. I guess you're right, Ben. When you and your mum stayed here, you lived with the same people for quite a long time, didn't you? Most families have just been at the Safehouse for a few days lately. People come and go. Sometimes they find new houses quickly, or they move to a new city or something.

(*JEN and BEN walk towards the playroom, where the other kids are already knocking on the door*).

CHANTELLE: (*Opens the playroom door from the inside*) Hey everyone. You made it.

KERRY: (*Walks immediately to the snack table, picks up a muesli bar, looks*

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<sup>14</sup>A small cottage rented by the Palmerston North Women's Refuge

*around*) You changed the room. It looks different.

CHANTELLE: Yeah, I made a talking and discussion space over there (*points to the floor mat*), an eating space here, and an art and free-time space there (*points to two tables pushed together with chairs around them*).

JAMIE: (*Absentmindedly peels a banana. Speaks to no one in particular*) If I could be any animal in the world, it would be a jaguar. Cuz I like how they sharpen their claws on trees.

STEVEN: (*Jumps around on the sofa, then hides his head under a blanket. Mumbles*) I'd be a cheetah. (*Head pops up*) Phew, it's hard to breathe under there! Cuz I'm a good runner and a good jumper.

KERRY: (*Looks at Jen*) You got food that Jamie would like this time.

JEN: Yep, I listened to your suggestions last week. I didn't know if he'd like the cheese though, but—

JAMIE: (*Yells*) I don't.

JEN: But at least you like the muesli bars and bananas, right (*looks at JAMIE who is eating his second banana now*)?

OLIVIA: (*Sits on the mattress in the discussion area*) Did you have a good day Chantelle?

CHANTELLE: Yeah, it was pretty good, but even better now that I'm here. I think today will be fun. So... (*pauses*), let's get started everyone. Can you all find a comfy seat on the mat or around the rug? Hey, Steven, will you come out from under the blanket too for this please? We'll open the group with a karakia. Like always.

KERRY: (*Arm shoots into the air, like in a classroom. Strains*) Oh, oh, oh. Can I do it this week? Can I, please?

OLIVIA: (*Pleading voice*) Oh can I do it?

JEN: (*Looks at BEN who is bouncing up and down on a foot stool*) Won't it be a

little hard to pay attention like that, Ben? (*Turns to OLIVIA*) Actually, I think today we should let Chantelle do the karakia since she hasn't had a turn yet.

(*JAMIE shifts around on a foot stool, looking uncomfortable*).

CHANTELLE: Okay then. (*Speaks slowly and softly*) Thank you all for coming back to the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* this afternoon. May we all enjoy being together today and learn more about ourselves and each other in the group. Thank you for the beautiful place we live and for all the people and other animals we share our lives with. May all of them too have a happy day.

JEN: Aw, that was a sweet one.

OLIVIA: We usually do our karakias in Māori.

JAMIE: (*Throws his arms in the air. Voice animated*) Oh no! Don't do it in Māori. I won't know *what* you're talking about!

JEN: (*Laughs a little*) We will do some Māori karakias too—maybe next week even—but, right now, let's get started. We'll do the—

KERRY: (*Interrupts*) Are we doing where we tell how we felt this week?

CHANTELLE: Yep, that's right. We'll go around the circle and you can tell us about something that happened this week and how you felt about it... (*voices trails off*).

OLIVIA: Oh I have a lot of feelings to share. Can I go first?

JEN: Yep, okay. And then Kerry next. We'll go around the circle that way, like a clock (*draws a clockwise motion with her finger through the air*).

OLIVIA: Oh, thanks. (*Thoughtfully*) I felt sad a lot this week because I stayed at my mum's house for a couple days but I didn't even get to see her. And my mum didn't wake up to take me to school today either.

CHANTELLE: (*Nods*) Mmm, yeah.

OLIVIA: And then (*pauses, takes a big breath*), I felt happy and excited today when

I saw Jennifer at school because I wanted to come here. And, before that, during school today—another sad thing happened. I felt really hurt because my friend said some mean things about me when we were playing Four-Square. I ran back into my classroom and I cried, but then some of my friends came and got me and made me feel better. (*Sighs with relief*) Phew! I'm glad I have *some* nice friends, at least.

JEN: Oh, that's pretty frustrating, isn't it? I can remember a lot of times when kids were really mean to each other at school.

JAMIE: (*Looks serious*) I just ignore them, and walk away.

KERRY: (*Turns to OLIVIA. Earnestly*) Or you can tell a teacher.

OLIVIA: Mmm. The funny thing is, the girl who was mean really didn't feel bad about it.

CHANTELLE: That's too bad Olivia. Thanks for sharing so many feelings with us though. That was great because you showed how we can have many different feelings all in the same day. Okay, Kerry? You ready to go next?

KERRY: Umm, umm (*scrunches up her face*). I felt happy this week. And I had a happy and (*pauses*), um, happy and fun weekend. Oh, except I had to stay with a babysitter because Mum went to a "no kids allowed" wedding. And the babysitter was boring.

JEN: Aww, too bad!

CHANTELLE: So you felt happy and bored and a little bit disappointed maybe that you had to stay with a babysitter instead of going to a wedding?

KERRY: (*Nods*) Mm-hmm.

JEN: Okay, thanks Kerry. Ben, it's your turn. What happened to you this week that you feel like telling the group about, and how did you feel?

BEN: (*Sits cross-legged with hands in prayer position. Bows repeatedly, then speaks in gibberish Chinese*) Jiii-an ching chow.

JEN: Hmm, do you think you could translate that to English, Ben, so we could

understand your language?

BEN: (*Bows over and over again*) Ching-chow, ching-chowww.

KERRY: (*Looks annoyed, then sighs with frustration*) I think Ben should get a consequence for that.

JEN: So no translation for us, Ben?

(BEN *keeps making gibberish Chinese sounds*).

CHANTELLE: Well, that's okay. We'll just move on. Okay, Steven, how 'bout you?

STEVEN: Um, well. . . um, well. I was sad this week because I miss my brother, Ty. Cuz he decided to go live with my mum again but I'm still with my auntie.

JEN: Oh yeah, that sounds sad. Hmm. (*Pause*).

CHANTELLE: Okay, thanks for sharing that with us. Jamie, how about you? Anything interesting or exciting happen this week that you'd like to talk about?

JAMIE: (*Shrugs, pulls his legs up to his chest and hugs them close to his body*) Mmm. (*Wrinkles his eyebrows*) Ummm. (*Long pause*).

CHANTELLE: Would it help if you used the feelings chart? You could tell us something that happened—maybe something you did on the weekend—and then point to how it made you feel on the chart?

(JAMIE *looks sulky now*).

OLIVIA: If you don't know, you can just point to the question mark.

(JAMIE *diverts his eyes from everyone and sighs*).

JEN: Well, that's okay. You don't have to share anything either. It's okay not to share in this group, right? Let's go on to—

KERRY: (*Blurts out*) Jamie didn't want to go to school today because he didn't want to come here, to *Dragonflies*.

JAMIE: (*Glares at KERRY*) Shhhhhhhush, Kerry!

CHANTELLE: Oh, well. Let's not embarrass each other. Besides, it's okay if that's true anyway Jamie. If you don't want to come to the group you don't have to. You can change your mind.

JAMIE: (*Angrily*) I wanted to come.

CHANTELLE: Okay, great then. Awesome, actually. So, did anyone do their homework before we talk about the feeling of the day?

BEN: (*Jumps up, runs to the door and picks up his school bag. Brings it back to the group, and starts rummaging through it*) I have my homework.

OLIVIA: Oh, my auntie forgot to pack ours. But I did mine.

STEVEN: I didn't do it. I didn't have time.

JAMIE: Me neither.

JEN: Well, let's see what Ben did then? You can bring yours next time Olivia. Do you want to read your answers to the group, Ben?

BEN: (*Hands two pieces of paper to JEN*) You can do it. I can't read.

JEN: Okay. Let's see (*looks at first piece of homework*). Five things that Ben likes to do with his family are: Go to the swimming pools, read bedtime stories, eat, play with his sister, and play with his puppy. Five things that confuse Ben about his family are (*looks at the second homework sheet, then pauses*). Oh, I see (*smiles at BEN*). Ben wrote "I am never confused."

BEN: (*Emphatically*) I'm *never* confused.

CHANTELLE: Really?

BEN: No.

JEN: Do you mean you *always* know the answers to everything?

BEN: (*Shrugs*). Do I get some stickers for my homework?

CHANTELLE: Yep, pick through these ones here (*takes some sticker sheets out of*

*her folder*). One for each page. And thanks for doing your homework Ben. You are really good at getting it done. Did your mum help you write the answers?

BEN: Yep, she wrote them. But I told them to her.

OLIVIA: (*Looks disappointed*) My mum said she would help me, but she didn't.

KERRY: My mum was going to help us too but we had a busy week, so that's why I couldn't do mine.

BEN: (*Points to different stickers*) Can I have this one? And this one? And this one, and this one, and this one (*voice gets louder and louder*)?

JEN: Just two, Ben, and then can you please put your folder away? Let's do the feeling of the day now. We better go a bit faster or we'll run out of time today.

KERRY: Are we doing those? (*Points to the feelings face chart*).

JEN: Yep.

KERRY: Can we do the bear cards too?

CHANTELLE: Not today, but we'll do another card activity before we go home.

STEVEN: (*Jumps off the sofa and tries to reach all the feeling faces with his hand, jumping over and over*) I know which one we're doing. I know which one's today.

CHANTELLE: Which one d'you think, Steven?

BEN: (*Stands up and jumps up and down. Almost chants*) What's a feelings chart, what's a feelings chart, what's a feelings chart?

JAMIE: (*Gets up from the floor too now*) We've done that one (*jumps to reach it*). Sad.

STEVEN: And we did angry. Um, um, I think we're doing this one (*points to a purple face*).

JEN: You are almost right. Move your hand one over to the left.

(STEVEN *points at the "strong" feeling face*).

JEN: Yep, that's it. The feeling of the day is strong.

CHANTELLE: Okay, can everyone sit down again please?

BEN: (*Jumps up and down*) But I don't want to, I don't want to.

OLIVIA: Maybe you should put him in the 'Silent Chair.'

KERRY: Yeah. Ben should have a 'consequence.'

CHANTELLE: (*Sternly*) Ben, could you sit down?

BEN: (*With a dopey smile*) Can I sit in the Silent Chair?

JEN: It's not for fun. Okay, so, strong can mean quite a few things. There's the kind of strong that we all know about—when we are reeeaaaally fit and can run really far or lift heavy things, or we have a lot of muscles. You know that kind of strong, right? (*Looks at the group*). We want to talk about another kind of strong today though—one that is more of a feeling. It's an inside kind of strong.

OLIVIA: I know about that Jennifer. Like when you are brave.

CHANTELLE: Exactly. Maybe, actually, you could share a time when you felt "inside strong," Olivia, to help explain it to the group?

OLIVIA: Okay. (*Pauses for a few seconds*) You are strong when your parents are fighting, and when you have to do things you haven't tried or done before, like hide, or call the police, or something.

JEN: What a good example!

CHANTELLE: It was. Thanks, Olivia.

(*OLIVIA beams*).

CHANTELLE: Can anyone else think of a time when they stood up for something they believed in maybe, or felt strong inside? Not a time when you used violence to feel strong though. Does that make sense?

KERRY: Um, you are strong when your friends are mean and it's abuse, and you

tell a teacher.

JEN: Yeah, that can be a really hard thing to do. It can be hard to ask for help sometimes, but we need to keep ourselves safe. Thanks Kerry. How about you Jamie? Can you think of a time when you felt strong inside?

(JAMIE *pouts and looks away*).

OLIVIA: (*Looks at her brother. Encouragingly*) You've been strong before, Steven.

STEVEN: Um, well, when some kids at school are annoying me, my brother might come up and say "What did you do to my brother?" and he would say "I'm going to smash you up." Cuz he's pretty strong, my brother. (*Takes a breath, speaks quickly now*) And, and... And there is a bully at school and I'd like to smash him up too but I can't. If I was at home though, I could do it.

CHANTELLE: Okay, Steven, but you're talking about that other kind of strong, right? The kind of strong that isn't a feeling and sometimes means you are being violent too.

STEVEN: (*Looks thoughtful*) Well, I know that we don't hurt women, like we shouldn't hurt girls, or fight them.

JEN: Oh yeah, that's true, but maybe you shouldn't hurt boys either, since they might feel sad or scared or you might really injure them. Plus some kids might think you are really mean then.

CHANTELLE: Yeah, you know what? One of the strongest things you can do is stop yourself from hurting someone even if they've done something really mean or something that's made you angry. Sometimes it's pretty strong to walk away, like Jamie says he does, or just to tell a teacher, like Kerry.

JEN: (*Looks at STEVEN*) Can you think of a time when you did something that was really hard for you? It probably gave you a strong feeling inside, knowing you could do it?

STEVEN: Sometimes I know that I can do something like win a race.

JEN: (*Excitedly*) Yes, yeah! Do you mean that you feel confident in yourself that you are a fast runner?

STEVEN: I just know in my head “I’m the best” but I don’t say that to anyone. I just know.

CHANTELLE: That’s a good example of feeling strong inside yourself, Steven. Good one! I think you might be really good at anything you try with that kind of confidence.

JEN: (*Laughs*) I definitely think you’ll be a good athlete.

STEVEN: (*Smiles happily*) Oh, I already am. (*Suddenly makes a “T” with his hands, jumps up, and runs out the door of the playroom*).

JAMIE: Hey, where is he going?

JEN: I think that was the “time out” symbol he gave us; I bet he’s just gone for a toilet break.

(*BEN stands up, takes a few books off a shelf, and flips through them rapidly*).

CHANTELLE: Okay, well, it’s storytime now. Maybe we need a seating plan (*looks at BEN*) so that we don’t distract each other. What do you guys think?

KERRY: Yes, puh-lease.

JEN: Okay. (*Designates seats for everyone, then takes out the book “A Place for Starr” by Howard Schor and Mary Kilpatrick, from her folder*).

STEVEN: (*Enters room again*) Phew, I was busting!

(*JEN points to STEVEN’s seat silently. STEVEN sits down. BEN jumps up from his assigned seat and makes gibberish noises*).

CHANTELLE: Ben, d’you think you’ll be able to pay attention to the book or do you need a quick run-around outside?

(*BEN sticks his tongue out and pants. Shakes head “yes”*).

CHANTELLE: Okay, let's go quickly. (*Leads BEN outside and instructs him to run around the yard, make a lot of noise, and get all of his energy out*).

OLIVIA: Can I help you read, Jennifer? I'm a fast reader.

JEN: Well, maybe you can help read the poem next week, but Chantelle and I will read all the stories just so we've got a routine. (*Smiles*) I know you're a fast reader though.

(*BEN and CHANTELLE enter the playroom again*).

JEN: Did you get all your craziness out, Ben? Your seat is that one, remember? (*Points*).

(*BEN flops down into his seat, sticks his tongue out and pants again*).

KERRY: (*Looks annoyed, stares at BEN*) He's doing it again!

CHANTELLE: Well, let's just get on with the book. This is a story about a girl named Starr and how she and her family leave their dad because he is abusive, and go to a shelter to live for a little while.

KERRY: (*Excitedly*) Just like this place.

JEN: Yep, exactly, like Women's Refuge. Starr is really brave and strong so that's why we chose this book—because it will help us understand the feeling of the day. Okay, sooo... (*Flips to the first page and starts reading*):

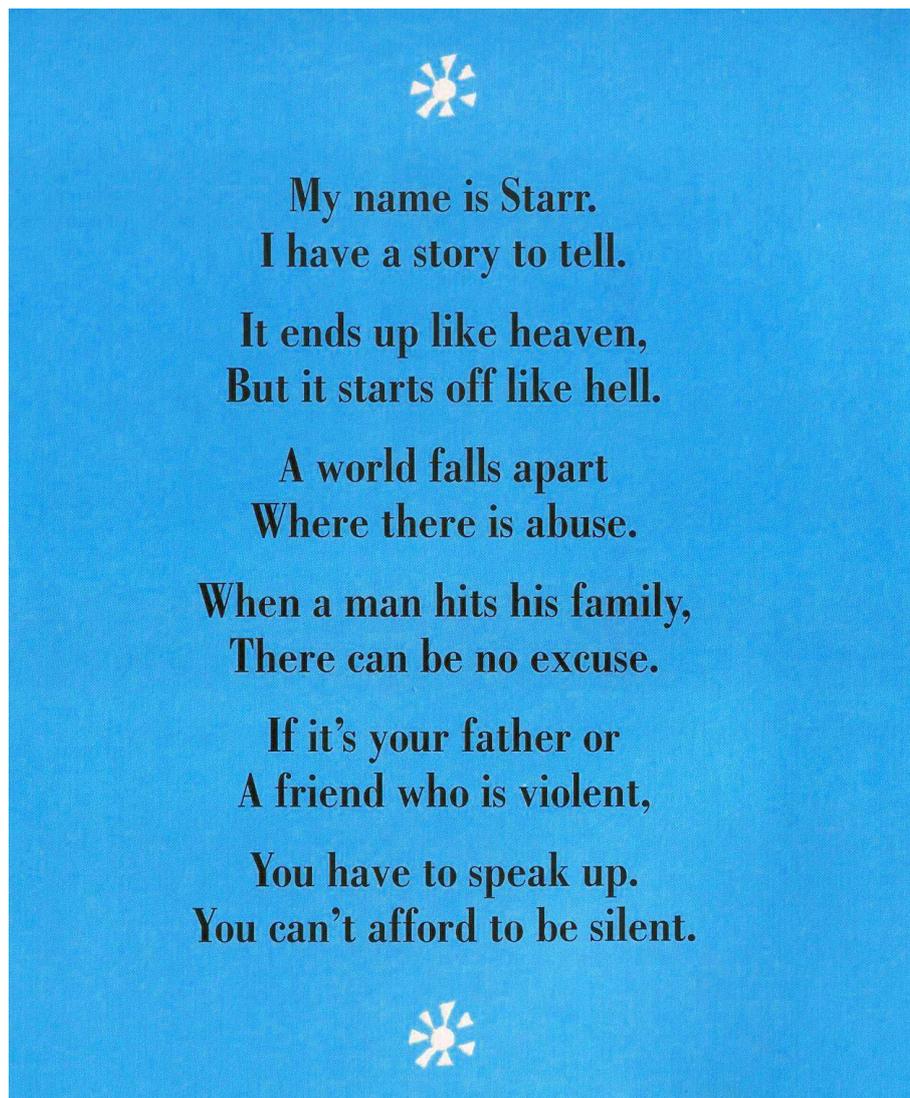


Figure 3.1: Excerpt from storybook, *A Place for Starr: A Story of Hope for Children Experiencing Family Violence*, by Howard Schor and Mary Kilpatrick.

JAMIE: (*Interrupts*) Um, excuse me, but every second line of this book rhymes.

CHANTELLE: Yep, it's kind of like a long poem.

JAMIE: Why does she have a long neck?

(STEVEN *giggles*).

JEN: That's just how she was drawn, Jamie. Okay, is everyone ready to pay attention?

OLIVIA: (*Sounds exasperated*) Yes, this is getting annoying. It's hard to concentrate.

CHANTELLE: Yeah, I know what you mean. (*Starts reading the second page of the book*).

(*All the kids listen well to the story for the next 10 minutes, even pulling their chairs in a little closer to see the pictures better. Then JEN and CHANTELLE split the kids into two tables, one for the boys and one for the girls, and hand out workbooks with questions on the story.*)

KERRY: Yes, I love these workbooks! I'm going to finish mine first.

OLIVIA: (*Looks a little annoyed*) Well, I don't *want* to go fast. I want to be careful with mine.

CHANTELLE: Why don't you two just work at your own pace? If you get stuck with a question, just ask me—I will sit at your table— or you could ask each other.

KERRY: (*Reads first page aloud*) "What is abuse?" (*Excitedly*) Oh, oh. I know this. (*Writes "screaming," "punching," and "kicking" on her page*).

OLIVIA: I'm printing my "I's" with little circles on them. (*Finishes her first page*):<sup>15</sup>

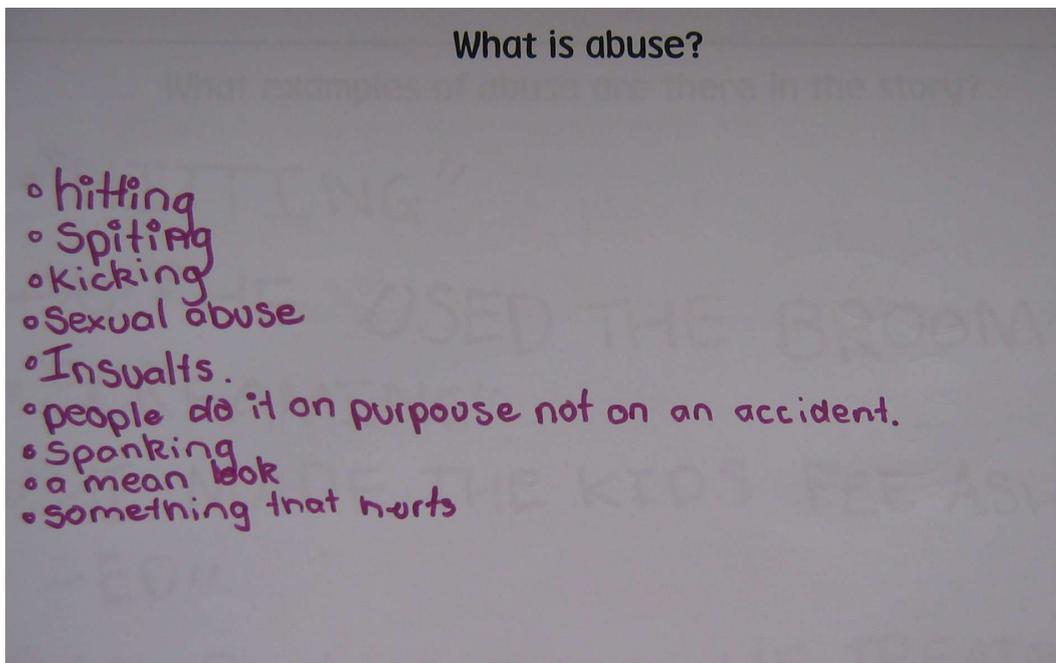


Figure 3.2: *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* workbook activity: Olivia's answers.

JAMIE: (*Reads page 2 slowly aloud, working with JEN*) What—does—it—feel... (*looks at JEN for agreement on his reading*).

JEN: Yep, that's it.

JAMIE: (*Continues*)—like, when—parents—fight?

<sup>15</sup>I incorporated a number of workbook and thematic drawing activities into the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* curriculum to generate different forms of narratives about children's lives. A few of the 'results' are presented in this chapter. Older children tended to be more inhibited about drawing activities, fearing a "lack of artistic competence" (Punch, 2002, p. 331), but younger participants appreciated drawing because it was fun and allowed a sufficient amount of time to think carefully about the experiences they wanted to represent on the page (as opposed to the quick pace of interviews, for example). The drawings were useful to me, as well, for gaining direct insight into "how children see their world[s]" (Punch, 2002, p. 331).

(JEN *nods at JAMIE, with a smile. JAMIE looks proud at himself for reading the sentence correctly. He selects a black felt pen and carefully draws a person with hair standing straight up*):

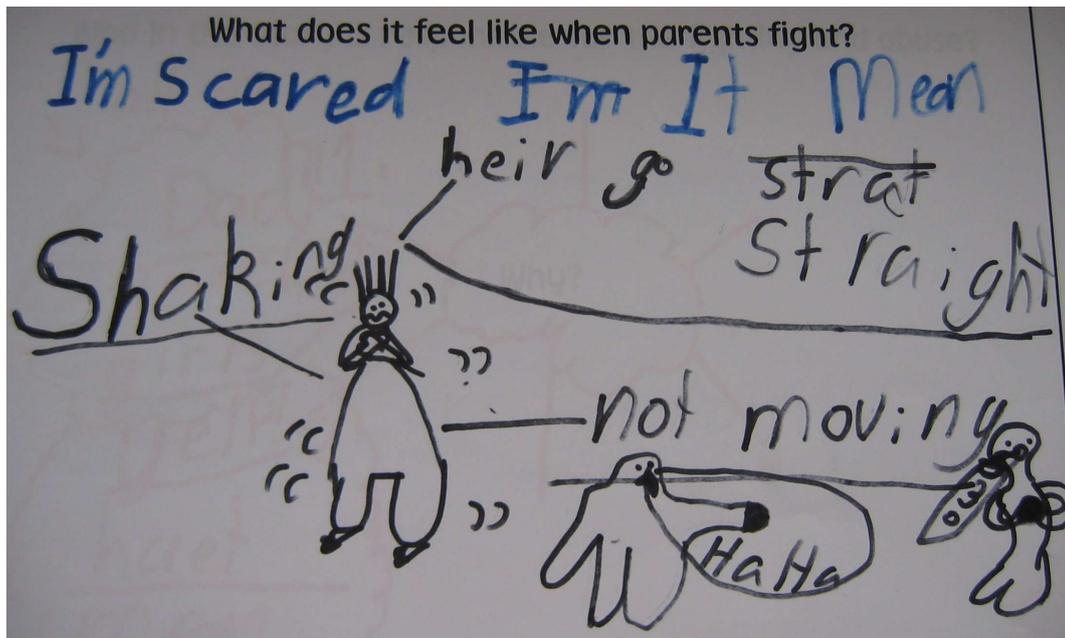


Figure 3.3: *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* workbook activity: Jamie's answers.

JEN: Oh, wow Jamie, that's good. How come you made the hair stand up like that?

JAMIE: (*Focusing on his drawing. Mutters*) Because when your parents fight you get really scared so your hair stands up. And you shake.

STEVEN: (*Working quickly, looks up at JEN*) That's not really fair when your mum and dad are fighting, and your dad is hurting your mum. That's not a good example, because that's not how we treat our women.

CHANTELLE: (*Looks over at JEN and the boy's table*) That's interesting, Steven.

STEVEN: (*Continues*) And we could grow up to hurt them but that's not the right way to treat them, because women have more brittle bones than us. That's what my auntie said. Like, some women *are* good at sports, but they have smaller bones

and they break easier than us. (*Flips to Page 5, looks at JEN*) What does this mean?

JEN: Um, let's see (*moves closer to STEVEN's page*). Oh, yeah. There are two parts to this question. Part "a" says, "How do you think Starr felt when she left for the shelter with her mum and Tyler?" Part "b" says, "How do you think Starr felt at the end of the book when she is thinking about her future?"

STEVEN: (*Gets up and walks over to the girl's table*) What did you put Olivia?

OLIVIA: (*Looks up*) For what?

CHANTELLE: (*Looks at STEVEN*) Page 5, right?

(*OLIVIA flips to Page 5 of her workbook and reads her answers to STEVEN*):

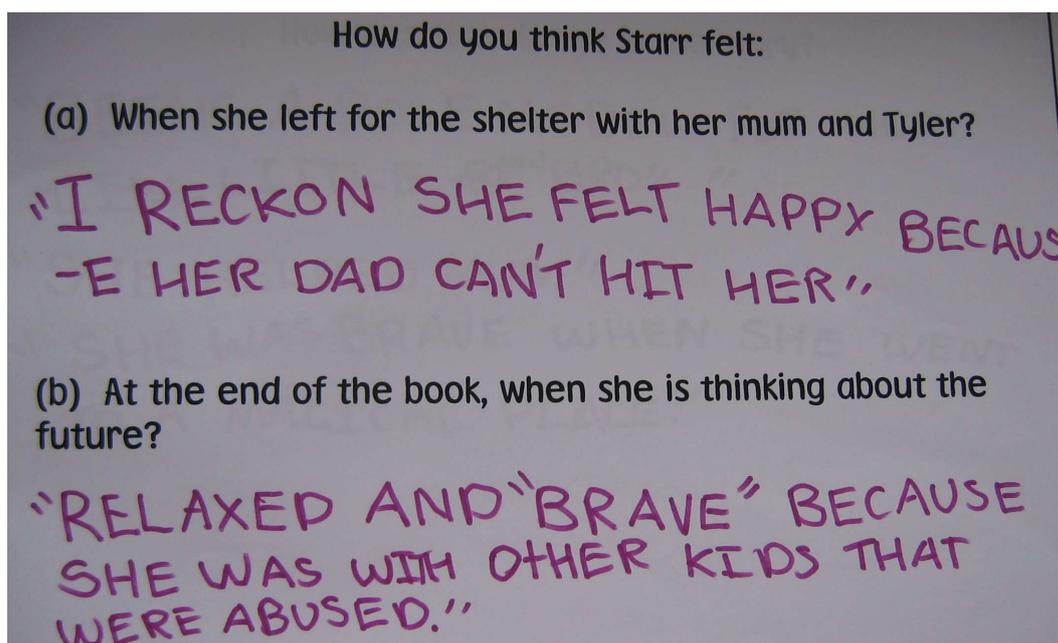


Figure 3.4: *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* workbook activity: Olivia's answers.

STEVEN: (*Looks thoughtful*) Mmm, okay. (*Walks back to his table, looks at JEN*) I think that at the end of the book Starr is hoping that her dad never hits.

JEN: Oh, that's a good answer Steven. Do you need some help writing it down?

*(The children work contently on the books for the next 15 minutes. BEN draws pictures for all of his answers. JAMIE is very serious about his work, putting a lot of effort into his drawings and asking for the correct spelling for most words.*

*OLIVIA gives each page much consideration too and tries to make them attractive and colourful. KERRY spends a lot of time recalling the story and asking questions about it. STEVEN works quickly through his book, then turns it over and draws pictures while the others finish).*

JEN: Wow, I'm so proud of everyone for doing such a good job on this activity. Are you really tired of drawing now, though?

CHANTELLE: Cuz we had another drawing exercise planned, but we could do something else if you need a change.

STEVEN: *(Sighs)* I'm a little tired of drawing, but what would we have to do?

JAMIE: *(Perks up)* I like drawing. Can we draw anything we like?

BEN: Can I sit with Jamie again?

JEN: Well, actually, for this exercise we need you to all sit in separate places so you can concentrate really hard on your own work. We'll even put on some music so you can listen to that instead of talking.

OLIVIA: *(Curiously)* Oh? What are we going to draw, Jennifer?

KERRY: *(Speaks with her head down)* I'm not very good at drawing.

CHANTELLE: That's not true; you're great! But don't worry about that anyway because this activity is more about thinking and sharing a story of violence or fighting that you've seen in your life than about drawing. The picture is just to help you explain what happened, what you saw.

OLIVIA: *(With astonishment)* So do you mean we are going to draw a fight we've seen?

JEN: Yeah, we call this the 'angry drawing activity' since we'd like you to think

about one of the angriest fights you've ever seen and then show us what happened, and who was there, on your piece of paper.

OLIVIA: (*Looks surprised*) Really?

CHANTELLE: Yeah. It's so we can share some of the things we've seen in the group together.

OLIVIA: I'm not sure I'll be able to talk about mine.

JEN: Oh, that's okay. You don't have to share anything you don't want to in this group, but it might seem easier after you have the picture. Okay, I'll put the music on. Do you want to hand out the paper, Chantelle?

CHANTELLE: (*Hands out paper and felt pens to each child, and suggests a place they might want to sit*) Does anyone have any questions?

STEVEN: If we finish quickly, can we draw another picture on the back?

CHANTELLE: Yep, sure, just try to stay quiet so everyone can concentrate on their drawings, right?

(STEVEN *nods*).

(JEN *turns the music on and the kids draw for about 10 minutes. BEN has trouble getting focused at first but then settles into his work. He talks a little to himself, but doesn't distract anyone*).

CHANTELLE: Okay, let's wrap up what you're doing now (*turns off the music*) and come sit down again in the discussion circle with your drawings.

JEN: I know it might be really hard to share what you've drawn, so I thought maybe we should read our first group rule together again to remind each other what it says.

KERRY: (*Throws her arm in the air. With strained voice*) Oh, can I read it?

CHANTELLE: Yep, sure. Then we can all read it together after you.

KERRY: (*Smiles*) Okay, rule number one: Keep Things Private.

JEN: Yep. Everyone want to repeat it now? Keep—

ALL: Things—Private.

JEN: Remember we had that talk about confidentiality on the first group day? We talked about how that means you keep everything in this group private. So you can share whatever you want about what *you* say at *Dragonflies* with your mum or anyone else, but you shouldn't talk about anything anyone else says?

BEN: (*Looks goofy*) What's confidential?

OLIVIA: (*Frustrated*) It's keeping things private, Ben!

(BEN *makes a silly face.*)

JEN: Is anyone feeling brave or strong enough to share their drawing first with the group?

CHANTELLE: Remember this group is a safe place to share some hard stuff like this, like the fights you've seen. Everyone who comes to this group has seen fighting in their families... (*voice trails off*).

STEVEN: Um, I'll go—No, no, no (*grins, and puts his head under the blanket*).

KERRY: Okay, I'll share mine. (*Shows the group her drawing*):



Figure 3.5: Kerry's 'angry fight' drawing: *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* group activity.

KERRY: It's just, um (*pauses*). My mum and dad had a really big fight and my dad was saying "I bloody hate you" to Mum and yelling and stuff. And Mum said she was going to call the police.

JEN: Oh, that sounds scary. Did she call them?

KERRY: No, but the neighbours did. But my Dad left first, before they came. He just left and took our car.

CHANTELLE: What were you and Jamie doing while the fight was going on?

KERRY: We were just staying in our rooms. I could just hear them.

CHANTELLE: Oh good, you stayed safe. (*Exclaims*) Scary! Wow, thanks so much for sharing your picture first with the group, Kerry. That must have taken a lot of courage. I'm so proud of you.

KERRY: (*Smiles shyly*) It wasn't actually too hard.

OLIVIA: (*Jumps in*) Okay, I'll go next. I just want to get it over with. Ohhhh, I'm so nervous. I *don't* know why, but it's hard to talk about. (*Shows the group her drawing*):

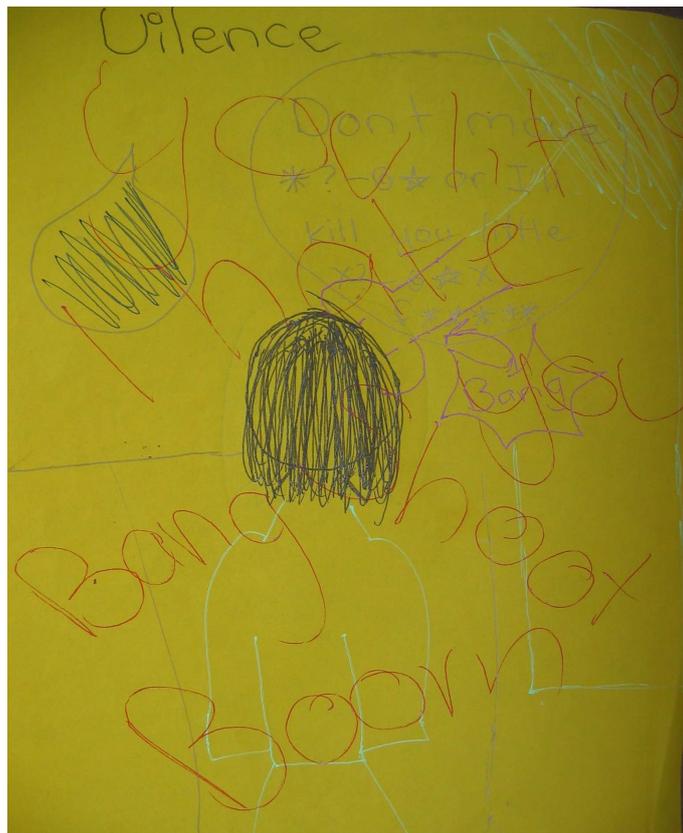


Figure 3.6: Olivia's 'angry fight' drawing: *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* group activity.

OLIVIA: (*Points to her picture*) The silver pen is my uncle's voice. It's when he and my auntie were staying with us at Mum and Dad's place. He was yelling at my auntie that he was going to kill her, and he was hitting her, and swearing, and throwing things around. That's why I wrote "bang" and "boom" in red, because it just sounded soooooo loud to me. There was just so much noise everywhere and he was saying over and over "I hate you."

JEN: (*Sympathetically*) Mmmm.

CHANTELLE: Who's the person in the centre?

OLIVIA: That's me. It looks like the back of my head, but really it's just that my hair is covering my face. Because that's how I feel when there's a fight—like no one sees me. And I don't want to see anything either really.

JEN: Oh, wow, that's a really good way to show that. I guess it's pretty hard when they carry on in front of you like you aren't even there?

OLIVIA: Yes.

CHANTELLE: (*Looks thoughtful*) Mmm. (*Pauses*). Well, thanks so much Olivia. You were nervous but you did such a good job. How do you feel now?

OLIVIA: (*Big smile*) Oh, much better. Yes, better now. Phew (*sighs*). It wasn't too hard. I'm feeling great now actually.

BEN: (*Bounces around on a foot stool*) Can I go? Can I go? Can I go?

CHANTELLE: Sure you can. Let's see what you drew.

(BEN shows his picture to the group):

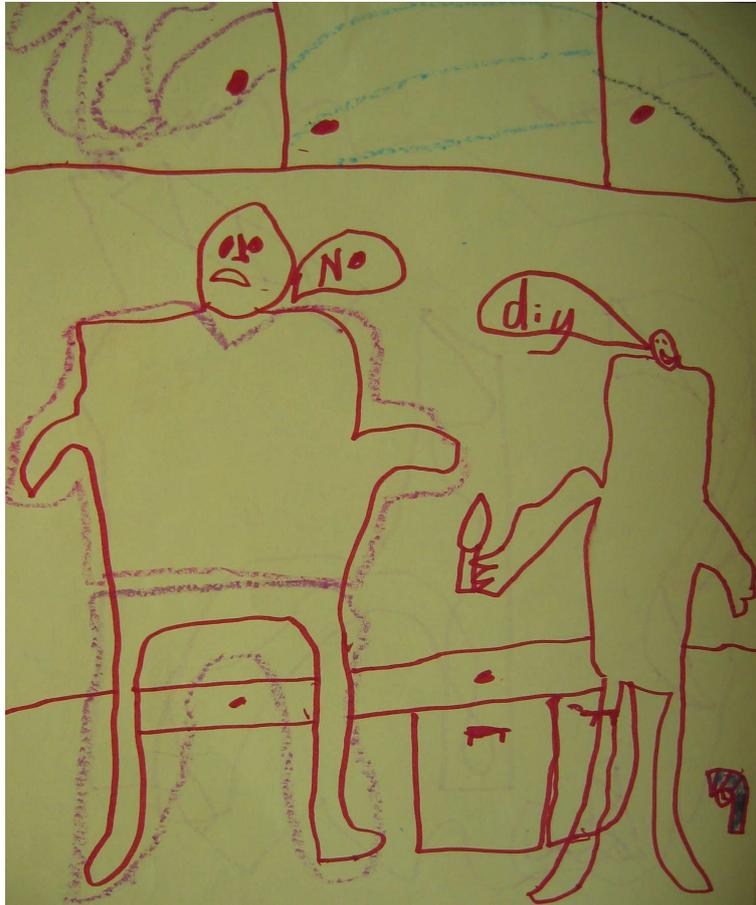


Figure 3.7: Ben's 'angry fight' drawing: *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* group activity.

OLIVIA: (*Exclaims*) Oh my gosh, that's scary!

JAMIE: Why is there a gun there?

JEN: Where's the gun?

BEN: (*Points to the bottom right corner of the page*) Cuz it's when my mum's old boyfriend, Simon, he beat up my mum. He beat her up sometimes when I was at school and then she was crying. And one day I came home and he was there and

(*pauses*). I was going to run next door to the neighbours but Simon was there, and he had some friends, and they wouldn't let me. (*Looks at the group with a huge grin, then speaks very quickly*) So I just cut off his head and smashed him up. And I had a gun too.<sup>16</sup>

(STEVEN's *eyes widen and look excited*).

KERRY: (*With disbelief*) You did NOT!

JAMIE: Why does it say "D—I—Y?"

BEN: Die. Cuz Simon was telling my mum that he wanted her to die.

JAMIE: That's not how you spell die!

BEN: (*Shrugs*) Well I don't know how to spell.

CHANTELLE: So is this drawing something you actually saw, Ben? I mean, did you see Simon with a flame like that—is it a lighter? And was there really a gun?

(BEN *nods frantically. Sticks tongue out and pants*).

OLIVIA: (*Looks at JEN and CHANTELLE*) I don't think this is real at all.

JEN: Well, it sounds like at least some of it is real to Ben. And what a good artist you are, Ben. (*Pauses*). So, thanks for sharing your picture with the group. (*Looks around*) Who do we have left? Steven and Jamie. Do either of you feel like telling us about your drawings?

STEVEN: (*Pulls the blanket over his face, then quickly pops up again*) Okay, I can do it.

JAMIE: (*With a grumpy tone*) Okay, fine. Me too.

CHANTELLE: Awesome. You guys are really brave to do this. Oh, hey, Steven, you know what? This is an example of a time you've been strong inside. Right now.

STEVEN: (*Nods, then shyly*) I drew a time when my dad was really angry and he

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<sup>16</sup>Many of the male participants in this research embellished violent stories as Ben does here. This is discussed more in Chapter 5, Joshua's story.

was swearing at my mum. And all this stuff here (*points to bottom of his page*) is just things on the ground, because my dad was smashing stuff up. Like he threw some chairs across the room and he broke some plates.

JEN: Whoa, did anyone get cut or hurt?

STEVEN: No. And I was just standing there.

CHANTELLE: What were you thinking?

STEVEN: I was just thinking that my mum or my dad might get hurt.

CHANTELLE: Were you scared?

STEVEN: (*Nods*) Yes. (*Pauses*) Can I keep my drawing?

JEN: Yeah, sure.

OLIVIA: (*Interjects*) I do NOT want to keep my drawing. My mum would just ask me too many questions about it. She'd give me a real talking to.

STEVEN: I'm going to keep mine in a safe place where no one can see it.

CHANTELLE: Okay, so, last but not least—Jamie. What have you drawn Jamie?

(JAMIE *displays his drawing for the group*):



Figure 3.8: Jamie's 'angry fight' drawing: *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* group activity.

KERRY: Who's that (*points to JAMIE's page*)?

JAMIE: (*Without looking up, mumbles*) Me and you, Kerry. You are crying like you always do.

KERRY: (*Indignantly*) I do not!

JEN: How are you feeling in the drawing, Jamie?

JAMIE: (*Still looks sulky*) Really really really angry.

CHANTELLE: Is this how it seems to you when your parents fight, Jamie? You get really angry and Kerry gets really sad?

(JAMIE *mutters to himself*).

KERRY: I only cry when Dad slaps me on the face cuz I'm in trouble.

JEN: Oh? Did that happen a lot, Kerry?

KERRY: Just sometimes. When I broke something or did something naughty.

CHANTELLE: That doesn't seem fair at all to get hit like that. Did that happen to you too, Jamie?

JAMIE: No. I didn't get a slap.

JEN: Never?

JAMIE: No.

JEN: Do you know how come you didn't get hit, but Kerry did?

JAMIE: I guess cuz I'm a boy like him. (*Grabs his drawing back from the floor where it was displayed for the group*). I don't want to keep this. (*Crumples up his drawing*).

JEN: Hey, that's a good idea, Jamie. If you don't want to keep your drawings you could all crumple them up, or rip them, or something like that. Try to get rid of your bad feelings about them too if you can, at least for the rest of the group.

OLIVIA: Oh cool! Can I have some scissors please?

CHANTELLE: Yep, they are just over there (*points to art table*).

(OLIVIA *walks over to table, picks up the scissors and cuts her drawing into tiny pieces*).<sup>17</sup>

(STEVEN *puts his drawing in his folder*).

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<sup>17</sup>The children's drawings were photographed before this final activity, where they were destroyed. I was unable to use the photograph taken of Steven's drawing due to its poor quality.

KERRY: (*Looks at Chantelle*) Just crumple it?

CHANTELLE: Sure, if you don't want to keep it, just crumple it up. Put all your bad feelings into the crumpling. Like this (*demonstrates with a spare piece of paper, screwing up her face in the process of squeezing the paper*).

(KERRY *crumples her drawing really quickly*).

JEN: Why don't you stomp on it too?

KERRY: (*Looks surprised but delighted*) Okay. (*Stands up*). Really?

(CHANTELLE *nods and KERRY stomps on her paper*).

JEN: Jamie, are you feeling okay?

(JAMIE *ignores JEN*).

CHANTELLE: Okay, well, we'll do a fun exercise with some cards now to hopefully make everyone feel a little happier before we go home, then we'll have our check-out circle. (*Shows the group a packet of cards*) These are kind of like the Bear Cards we used last week, but they are called Strengths Cards...

(*Group session concludes over the next ten minutes with each child identifying two of their personal strengths, and then sharing one thing they learned during the group today, one thing they liked, and one thing they didn't like. JEN and CHANTELLE hand out letters for the children's caregivers/parents and homework activities, then drive everyone home*).

## Reflections: Act II

Some groups of the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* felt immediately more ‘successful’ to me than others; the children in these programmes took away a lot of learning from each session and made obvious positive behavioural changes as a result. The success of other groups was far more difficult to assess. At times, individual behavioural issues interfered with an entire group’s learning<sup>18</sup> and, in other cases, participants seemed to have little interest in considering strategies for dealing with the violence they had experienced or keeping themselves safe in the future. Consistently, however, the *Dragonflies Programme* fostered a strong sense of camaraderie amongst participants. Chantelle and I encouraged as many “relational possibilities” (McCallister, 2004, p. 432) as we could between the children themselves, and the children and ourselves as facilitators. The strength of the programme, therefore, was that it provided an afterschool space for children to meet and talk to peers who shared similar experiences of family violence with fewer “restrictions over movement and talk” (McCallister, 2004, p. 432) than, for example, a traditional classroom environment.

Keeping with my commitment to applied research, I continually made minor changes to the programme in response to the needs and interests of the particular participants.<sup>19</sup> However, as Act II has made clear, sometimes the group activities worked well and sometimes they did not. In these reflections, I consider the distinct ways each group participant in Act II interacted, spoke, and behaved in the programme in order to point to some of the strengths and shortcomings of family violence intervention work and applied research with children in a group setting. I begin with Jamie and Ben; working with them in a group setting demonstrates some of the difficulties that became apparent over the course of my research. Then I draw some alternative conclusions about the potential value of the group from the experiences of Olivia, Kerry, and Steven.

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<sup>18</sup>Chapter 5 illustrates this challenge in the context of a particularly ‘difficult’ group participant, Joshua.

<sup>19</sup>As with all action-oriented research projects, I constantly integrated theory and practice, action and understanding (Dick, 1993).

## Jamie

The *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* was most effective where children were comfortable with group conversation and freely exchanged their ideas in the discussion circles. As such, the value of the setting was ambiguous for children like Jamie who find it extremely difficult to identify and articulate their feelings.<sup>20</sup>

At the beginning of Scene IV, Act II, Jamie becomes increasingly sulky and grumpy during the ‘feelings check-in’ activity when he struggles to explain to the group how he had felt during the week. This ‘struggle’ occurred every week in the programme *even* when Jamie volunteered enthusiastically to speak first in the discussion circle. As the other children focused their attention on him, he became visibly uncomfortable and eventually dismissed us entirely by diverting his eyes, shrugging, or ignoring us. After a few weeks together, Chantelle and I learned that Jamie recovered quickest from these incidents if we paid close attention to his body language and moved on to the next participant or activity at the first sign of his discomfort.

On other occasions, Jamie ‘tuned out’ group activities and conversations completely by drawing, standing on his head, flipping through books in the playroom, or building structures with the footstools strewn around the playroom. He had a tendency, as well, to focus on the small and seemingly extraneous details during the group activities, rather than the content or ‘messages’ (for example, the rhyming in the storybook, *A Place for Starr*, or the way Starr’s neck was “drawn extra long”). It was difficult to assess if Jamie was ‘tuning out’ due to boredom or if this was a coping strategy he used in uncomfortable situations. Indeed, throughout the programme, he explained to the group that his most effective tactic for dealing with the fighting in his family was to “keep on doing something.”<sup>21</sup>

Fortunately, the *Dragonflies* curriculum incorporated a variety of activities (puppet plays, role plays, storybooks, journal writing, drawings, relaxation exercises, etc.), for Chantelle and I were able to gain the most significant clues to the impact of the fighting in Jamie’s life through his artwork. Jamie was, in fact, highly expressive

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<sup>20</sup>The research interviews were similarly challenging for Jamie as he had trouble recalling and expressing his memories and feelings about past events.

<sup>21</sup>Jamie said he distracted himself from the fighting at home with his Playstation, a DVD, drawing, or anything else available immediately for his attention and focus.

with his drawings, as the workbook activity in Figure 3.3 indicates. While he never verbally expressed feeling afraid when witnessing violence in his home, he could talk about this in the group by using his drawings as guiding props. In general, activities that allowed Jamie to tap into his artistic talents seemed to engage his emotions and capture his imagination best in the programme.

## Ben

It was equally difficult to get to know Ben in the group environment of the *Dragonflies Programme*. In his case, though, the main drawback of the setting was the huge number of distractions it presented. Ben was endlessly seeking the attention of the other children in his programme, talking during discussions and activities, getting up and down, flapping his arms, and making inappropriate noises and faces. His hyper behaviour was distracting, even frustrating, for everyone at times, but it was largely tolerated since he was cheerful and positive overall. Ben was never abusive or aggressive in the programme and always seemed delighted to see me at his school on the group day.

Every week, Ben told the group that he had only felt “happiness” in his life. During the feelings check-in activity, he would remark—usually flippantly—that he felt happy on the particular day of the group and had felt happy throughout the entire week. At the end of the session, he always concluded that the day’s programme had made him feel “happy again.” Chantelle and I offered different scenarios and examples to assist Ben to think more seriously and complexly about his feelings throughout the programme but, in the end, we simply could not afford the time—nor was it appropriate to give him the intensive individual attention he needed—to focus his energy and clarify his thoughts and feelings. This points to one of the major shortcomings of a group programme for research *and* domestic-violence education work: It seemed easy to conclude that children such as Ben and Jamie—who weren’t able to easily access and articulate a range of emotions and personal experiences—had been less affected by the violence in their lives than others. The general worldviews and understandings of family violence these children possessed seemed somehow more naïve. This assumption is surely neither fair nor accurate.<sup>22</sup> Jamie’s drawings, for

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<sup>22</sup>I had to constantly challenge myself to be wary of arriving at such hasty conclusions.

example, indicated the significant impact of the violence in his life and Ben, also, came to some startling insights at unexpected times<sup>23</sup> during group conversations, suggesting that at least *some* of the group content had significant personal value or meaning for him. For both Ben and Jamie, however—as with others I met over the year I facilitated the *Dragonflies* groups—an individualised programme, where activities could be tailored to the children’s interests and skills, and the facilitator’s attention more focused, held promise for facilitating richer learning. Ideally, these kinds of options should be available in order for children’s family violence intervention services to be most effective.

While the value of a group programme was unclear for Jamie and Ben, the experiences of Olivia, Kerry and Steven each highlight, in different ways, some of the benefits of the setting for other children who have experienced family violence.

### Olivia

The *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* became an outlet for many of Olivia’s uncomfortable feelings, general stress and anxiety, and conflicted thoughts about the violence she had witnessed in her family. In Week 7 of the programme, for example—the session dedicated to understanding and dealing with sexual abuse—Olivia took the initiative to share her personal experience with the group. She began by clearing her throat, then asking of the group: “Is there anyone here who had this happen to them?” referring to the “bad touching” we were discussing in the group activity at the time. When no one responded, Olivia took a noticeably long breath and continued: “Okay, well, it happened to me. And I told right away.” After sharing a few additional details of her experience, Olivia smiled and said with relief, “I feel so much better now. That was a really scary thing to do.” Chantelle and I commended her for seeking help immediately after the abuse and for talking to us about it at our first meeting and in the group that day.

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<sup>23</sup>During one of the first group discussions about abuse, for example, Ben seemed completely lost in a ‘private world,’ flapping his hands, shaking them above his head, moving from chair to chair, and basically engaging in behaviours that normally indicated he wasn’t listening. Then, suddenly, he said to no one in particular, “It was brave when I came here,” referring to his temporary move into the PNWR Safehouse with his mother after they left his step-father. “Next time I see my dad—I mean, my ex-dad,” he corrected himself, “I should tell him he was a bad father because he hurt my mum.” Ben’s remark sparked a valuable conversation in the group and suggested he was far more engaged in the activity than it appeared.

This example illustrates some of the potential benefits of providing opportunities for children to talk about the important events in their lives, especially those shrouded in secrecy and social taboo, such as sexual abuse and family violence. First of all, Olivia experienced real physical relief after voicing her story in the group setting (she perked up noticeably and looked and sounded more relaxed upon sharing her experience). Also, in the process of telling her story, Olivia reconfirmed that she was a strong and confident person—two characteristics she values highly.<sup>24</sup> Third and, quite simply, Olivia felt heard. While she was speaking, the other children listened with an uncharacteristic attentiveness that neither Chantelle nor I received when we told our own stories in the group. Although none of the children talked to Olivia specifically about her experience of sexual abuse, she seemed to know intuitively that her words had resonated with them and she felt validated by their attention, as well as the praise that Chantelle and I gave her. In turn, this underscores another issue which surfaced frequently with participants in the *Dragonflies* groups; namely, Olivia's strong sense of morality often conflicted with the events she had witnessed over the course of her life in her family. Early in the programme, for example, Olivia mentioned wondering if, perhaps, there might be a good excuse for the fighting and abuse in her family even though she “knew in her body and her heart” that it was not acceptable. Whenever she shared a personal story of abuse and the other group participants, or facilitators, confirmed it was indeed “wrong,” “bad,” or “inexcusable,” Olivia was able to put some of these conflicted feelings to rest.

Throughout the programme, Olivia was remarkably honest. She regularly shared personal stories, as in Week 7, about confusing, hurtful, frustrating, scary, or otherwise unhappy feelings and experiences. As the group progressed, the more she talked about her experiences of violence, the more likely it was that another participant would tell a part of his or her own ‘life story’ as well. It seemed, then, that Olivia unintentionally put to ease some of the other children's fears and encouraged them to find their own voices in the process. Her answers and opinions during the *Dragonflies* group activities and research interviews were also always well-considered and insightful. Olivia was particularly self-reflective, self-confident, and comfortable talking about abuse and family violence, even before the *Dragonflies Programme* started, in part from the daily *whanau* (family) meetings she participated in at home. Cer-

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<sup>24</sup>This becomes evident in Act IV, Olivia's monologue.

tainly this ‘practice’ greatly facilitated the ease with which she communicated in the group, as well as the value she gained from it.<sup>25</sup>

The group setting was also beneficial for Kerry who—in contrast to Olivia—was shyer, less confident, and less comfortable articulating her inner feelings and thoughts about the violence and abuse in her family.

## **Kerry**

Kerry blended easily into the group. She paid close attention during the sessions, had a good work ethic, and appreciated the praise she received on work done well. She seemed to thrive on structure, routine, and order, and worked well with the group rules; indeed, she held them in high esteem.<sup>26</sup> Johnston, Gentner, Moore, and Roseby’s (2005) longitudinal research with children like Kerry, who have lived with family violence but aren’t “superficially symptomatic,”<sup>27</sup> suggests many of them “unravel” in adolescence and face serious challenges in adulthood, including borderline personality disorders (Johnston et al., 2005). Bearing these findings in mind, it was important to me not to minimise or overlook the impact of violence in Kerry’s life just because she worked easily and inconspicuously in the group.

In reality, the fighting Kerry had witnessed in her family was a source of intense shame and embarrassment. This first became evident in our initial assessment interview. At this time, Kerry became considerably withdrawn upon our question to her to describe, very generally, the fighting in their family. Jamie answered the question for her by warning us: “You better not ask about that. She [Kerry] is scared of Dad.” During the first two weeks of the programme, Kerry continued to become visibly uncomfortable when group discussions turned to the fighting in the children’s own families. She slouched, dropped her eyes and voice, fidgeted, and asked to leave the room on one occasion to avoid a conversation altogether. When the discussions were less about personal experiences and, rather, focused on abstract scenarios or

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<sup>25</sup>It becomes increasingly obvious over the course of this thesis that children appreciate opportunities like “whanau meetings” to articulate their concerns and needs.

<sup>26</sup>Kerry wanted the other children to “follow the rules” so the group, as a whole, would run smoothly and according to schedule.

<sup>27</sup>Johnston et al. (2005) refer to children who appear, on the surface, to be resilient. They don’t have obvious anger or other behaviour challenges, difficulty sitting still, paying attention, visible anxiety, etc.

role plays about violence and abuse, Kerry was able to participate but her ideas often seemed confused. For example, she told me passionately that “hitting [was] never okay under any circumstance,” yet justified violence and abuse in a number of the role plays we presented if, for example, the “victim” had started the argument by name-calling, or came home drunk, or had stolen something from the “perpetrator.” At Week 4 of the programme, when Kerry’s group read the book *A Family that Fights* by Sharon Bernstein, Kerry believed the mother in the story was responsible for the fighting because “she didn’t cook tea on time,” therefore provoking her partner to hit her. There seemed to be a disconnect between what she knew theoretically to be ‘right,’ ‘good,’ or the ‘correct answer’ and her everyday evaluations of her experiences of violence.

However, from the mid-way point of Kerry’s programme to its conclusion, she clearly began to overcome some of her shame and insecurities about the violence in her family. In Week 5, as seen in Act II, Kerry bravely offered to be the first group participant to share her ‘angry fight’ drawing. By the final session (Week 10), she no longer accepted any of the excuses or justifications for violence she initially believed, nor did she appear uncomfortable talking about her personal experiences. In large part, Kerry’s desire to ‘succeed’ amongst her peers seemed to be the impetus for the considerable efforts she made to contribute to the group conversations about family violence despite her initial discomfort with the subject. With the consistent ‘practice’ the group programme provided, Kerry was able to resolve many contradictions in her thinking about the nature of abuse.

### Steven

Steven<sup>28</sup> was relatively unique amongst my male research participants in his ability to comfortably articulate a wide spectrum of intimate thoughts and feelings. Like his sister Olivia, he came to the *Dragonflies Programme* with a strong sense of self-awareness and confidence, as well as ‘practice’ talking about abuse and family violence at home. The group programme was still valuable for him though, as it encouraged him to reflect regularly on his desired life trajectories. Indeed, Steven made a number

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<sup>28</sup>The next act of *A Record of Fieldwork* represents my final research conversation with Steven as a dialogue. It illuminates more of Steven’s conclusions about family violence than these short reflections offer, as well as his tendencies to aggressive behaviour.

of decisions about his future based on the content of the *Dragonflies* group activities and discussions, transforming himself over the course of my one year relationship with him, from a self-identified ‘fighter’ to someone who not only believed that “fighting is wrong,” but no longer felt angry enough to resort to violence or aggression. There seemed to be two primary components to Steven’s ‘self-transformation’: Learning to deal with his anger, and recognising that being strong—a characteristic he valued highly in general and his role models in particular—did not equate directly with being abusive.

During the initial assessment interview (represented in Act I), Steven explained to me and Chantelle that he received many detentions at school for fighting. He also spoke proudly about how he “liked to use his fists” and was “one of the best fighters” at his school during the first few group sessions. Similarly, Steven often talked about his older brother, father, and uncles in the group programme, all of whom he described as “fighters” and “riskers,” admirable because they “stuck up” for their friends (and sometimes for Steven himself) in aggressive ways. Steven initially believed his brother, Tyrell, “never got hurt” because he was strong. Thus, for Steven, at the beginning of the programme, strength referred exclusively to physical force and size and a corresponding ability to be intimidating.

By the half-way point (Week 5), however, Steven had decided that parents who fought, like his own, were not setting a “good example” for their sons who “could grow up and hurt [their] women too.” He remarked at the time: “That’s not what we should do.” From this point in the programme to its completion, he made a number of clear efforts to disrupt the cycle of family violence in his own life. Most of all, he seemed to reconcile his desire to be a ‘strong person’ with his desire to be a ‘good person.’ Steven came to understand that by uncritically accepting the violent relationships in his family<sup>29</sup> as the ‘models’ for his own relationships, he would have to be abusive and hurtful, neither of which were desirable. By the end of the programme he not only accepted the notion of ‘inner strength’ but took pride in his new ability to manage his angry feelings and avoid physical confrontations altogether.

The new skills and perspectives that Steven gained in the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* are indicative of the applied nature of my fieldwork. As Acts I and II have shown, in my roles as community worker and programme facilitator for the Palmer-

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<sup>29</sup>Between his mother and father and other family members.

ston North Women's Refuge (not to mention a 'participant' in the group programme), I worked to equip children with some practical tools to cope with the violence experienced in their lives. The 'interval' to *A Record of Fieldwork* follows next. It marks a shift in my role to a more traditional qualitative researcher/ethnographer. I discuss my interviewing strategies in the Interval; then, Acts III and IV follow with the more extended narratives of Steven and Olivia. These stories provide a forum for the children's concerns, feelings, worries, and dreams.

## Interval: From *Dragonflies* to Follow-up Interviews

I wrote field notes following each session of the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*, as well as collecting or photographing participant's group work where they did not want to keep it for themselves.<sup>30</sup> The group sessions were excellent opportunities to glimpse the varied ways children's knowledge and ideas about family violence developed and changed in their relationships with each other. However, there was never enough time in the *Dragonflies Programme* to allow the children's conversations to continue for lengthy periods, especially where one participant was particularly adept at talking about his or her life experiences. Also, over the course of the first programme, I gained a new appreciation for the phenomenological argument that humans, at best, *approximate* shared realities (Husserl, 1970; Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). The more children I met, and with each experience they shared in their groups, I realised how unique or singular their understandings of family violence truly were. As the first programme came to its end, I knew I wanted to tap deeper into the minutiae of the children's individual experiences, especially the more intimate details of their lives. Towards this end, I began to schedule follow-up interviews with the participants following the completion of their groups.

It also became clear early in the *Dragonflies* groups how comfortable children were, in general, with storytelling. Of all the activities we did in the programme together the children shared the most details about their lives, especially the uncomfortable experiences of witnessing violence, with the most ease, in the discussion circles. Even shy children always seemed to have a story to tell the group after a couple of weeks together. The children also responded with the most interest and empathy to other people's experiences, mine included, when they were presented in storied form, rather than as didactics.

Many of my participants had experienced at least one interview in their lives prior to our research conversation, usually with a social worker, lawyer, psychologist or other court-appointed person, about custody or access issues and/or their relationships with their parents. They described these experiences as highly structured and uncomfortable, so it was important to me to ease any potential anxieties

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<sup>30</sup>I have used group material from the *Dragonflies Programme* (including role-play topics, artwork, workbooks, questionnaires, etc.) to supplement my field notes and the interview data when constructing the children's narratives that feature in this thesis.

the children might have about *our* conversations together. As such, when I explained the interview process to the children—first with their caregiver(s) present at a post-programme meeting, and then before our recorded conversations began on the day—I emphasised that they should play the role of storyteller of their own lives in our discussion, telling me stories about their pasts, presents, and imagined futures. I usually continued further in this direction by inviting my participants to think about their lives as stories with many different chapters, plots, settings, and characters. I asked them to name each chapter and describe its important contents. For the older children, this helped frame their narratives and assisted them in recalling the key events of their pasts. The younger children, usually six to eight year olds, needed me to give more straightforward examples about the particular kinds of memories I was interested in hearing; for example, rather than asking for an open-ended response to questions about the ‘best moment’ in their life story, I chose more specific questions such as: “Can you tell me the time in your life when you were the happiest? Why were you so happy? What was happening? Who was there? What were you thinking? What were you feeling?”

After gaining a general outline of each participant’s story, we moved into conversations about particular life events, including highest and lowest points, turning points, earliest, and most important memories. I asked the children to describe these events with as much detail possible—for example, who was with them, what happened, how they reacted, what they were thinking and feeling, why the event was important to their life story, or what it said about the person they are today. Next, I would ask participants to reflect on the greatest challenges they had faced in their lives, how they coped (or didn’t cope) with these events, if other people assisted them, and how the challenges impacted their overall life stories.<sup>31</sup> Again, with the younger children—or any participant who seemed to be struggling to understand how to get started—I would simplify the questions, asking if they could talk to me about one of the biggest problems or hardest times in their entire lives and how they handled it.

The interviews also usually included a discussion about the other people in the participant’s lives who were positive or negative influences, who helped them or

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<sup>31</sup>The structure of the interviews around life themes later assisted me in comparing the large volume of textual information (particularly transcripts) gathered over the course of my fieldwork with different research participants. In other words, I was able to identify patterns of experiences amongst my participants based on the structuring themes of the interviews.

caused them a lot of pain and sadness. I also asked about favourite stories—the ones my participants had heard, watched, or (been) read—in an effort to better assess if any of these stories had an influence or impact on the life stories they narrated. Finally, we discussed alternative futures for our life stories. This involved thinking about the kinds of goals and dreams we might like to accomplish in our futures and trying to imagine what the future chapters of our life stories might look like. I attempted to gain a sense of the children's realistic fears and worries about their futures as well, asking if they could spend a moment describing an ending for their life story that they really hoped would not 'come true.'

In general, the children's memories, experiences, and understandings of family violence emerged naturally from the stories they told me of their lives, especially about their lowest points, turning points, and life challenges. Sometimes, however, especially with the younger participants, it was necessary for me to ask specific questions about the violence they had witnessed in their families in order to better understand the meanings they assigned to these experiences. In these instances, I invited participants to tell me a story that would help me understand the day-to-day life of a child in a family that fights. I also occasionally asked them to talk to me about the kinds of things they wanted, needed, and expected from their parents; how they felt when they watched a fight in their families; and what they learned, both positive and negative, or anything at all, from the fighting.

It is difficult to describe the interviews without making them sound more structured and sterile than they were in reality. It was important to me to create a comfortable atmosphere for the conversations, so I would ask each participant if he or she preferred to find a quiet space at their homes for our talk, or to join me at the Women's Centre in Palmerston North, or our *Dragonflies* playroom. My desire was, as Kiesinger's (1995), to create a "story-telling atmosphere— a warm, conversational space in which participants would feel safe accounting for their lives in vivid and detailed ways" (Kiesinger, 1995, p. 54). Overall, I believe I was successful in this goal as nearly every interview evolved into a free-flowing discussion. I reacted intuitively to the stories the children shared with me and asked the questions that arose naturally for me to stimulate further conversation.

Some children, just as some adults, are more natural storytellers than others. These participants eagerly took the initiative to lead our conversations and elaborated

on their experiences and memories with detail, eloquence, and enthusiasm. Steven and Olivia are two of these children. Act III is a dialogue between Steven and myself, based on our post-*Dragonflies* interview. Act IV represents Olivia's responses during our final research conversation.

### **Audience Briefing: Act III**

Act III grants readers a better understanding of Steven's life, in addition to illustrating the general processes and questions involved in my interviews with younger participants. What is strikingly clear in this act is that children as young as Steven, seven years old, are capable of talking about the violence they have witnessed and experienced in the context of a research interview. More than this, Steven speaks with passion, conviction, and in a matter of fact way, assisting readers to see domestic violence from a "child-centred perspective" (Mullender et al., 2002, p. 206). It is also obvious that the important people in Steven's life, especially his Auntie Shannon, have tried to protect him from the abuse he has witnessed by asking him to "keep quiet" and "move on." One of the key messages from Act III, however, is that children know a great deal about domestic violence and they "want far more opportunities to talk to other people about what is going on" (Mullender et al., 2002, p. 210). Steven's story illuminates a number of other common experiences of family violence shared by my research participants in New Zealand; I highlight these in the summary reflections.

**Act III: A Conversation with Steven**

SCENE I: *Playroom, a Wednesday afternoon around 4 pm.*

(STEVEN *slams the door of SHANNON's car and runs quickly toward the playroom, yelling goodbye to his auntie and sister. He is barefoot and wearing a t-shirt and shorts. JEN is huddled next to the heater in the playroom, wrapped in many layers of clothes. STEVEN opens the sliding door to the playroom, just enough to pop his head inside. He looks at JEN with a huge grin.*)

STEVEN: (*From the doorway*) Phew! I'm here. I ran really fast.

JEN: (*Laughs*) Yeah, I saw you. And with bare feet too! How can you do that? Doesn't it hurt?

STEVEN: (*Walks through the door. Casually*) Nah, nothing hurts me really.

JEN: So, do you want to make a Milo before we get started?

STEVEN: (*Nods enthusiastically*) Yep, yes. Yes please.

JEN: Okay, let's go to the kitchen for a few minutes then.

(*JEN and STEVEN leave the playroom talking about how much chocolate powder and sugar they like in their drinks.*)

SCENE II: *Playroom, 10 minutes later.*

(*JEN and STEVEN sit cross-legged on a mattress on the floor across from each other. They each have steaming mugs of Milo. JEN's digital recorder is placed between them and there are a few pieces of paper next to her, including the interview question guidelines and consent forms.*)

JEN: Okay, well, I guess we should get started or your auntie will be back to pick you up already... (*voice trails off*).

STEVEN: (*Laughs*) Yeah, we better hurry up.

JEN: The first thing we have to do is for my university. It's called a consent form.

STEVEN: (*Forehead wrinkles, looks interested*) Okay, but I don't know what that is.

JEN: Okay, I'll tell you about it. Remember how I met you and Olivia last week and told you I was writing a report—a really big homework project—for my university work? And I told you how I'd like to write about some of the things we did and talked about during the *Dragonflies* group if you agreed?

STEVEN: (*Nods*) Yes.

JEN: Well, the consent form is where you circle answers saying that I talked to you about those things and about our interview today.

STEVEN: (*Nods again*) Okay, I can read it.

JEN: (*Hands STEVEN the form and a pen*) I'll help you if you get stuck on the reading. (*Pauses*) Actually, we can read it out loud together if you like.

STEVEN: (*Nods*) Okay.

JEN: Okay, cool. So the first question says "Jen has told me that she is writing a report for her university work." You have to circle "yes" or "no" to this. Does that make sense?

STEVEN: (*Laughs and looks exasperated*) But you just told me that! I already know this. So I circle "yes?"

JEN: (*Laughs*) Yeah, I know I just told you. I guess it's easy then. Okay, the next one says "Jen will tape-record our interview and write about some of the things I say in her report, but she won't use my name. I agree that this is okay." So if you agree, Steven, you circle "yes" and if you don't agree, you circle "no."

(STEVEN circles "yes," then continues to work on the consent form for the next 10 minutes).

STEVEN: (*Looks up at JEN and exclaims*) Every answer is "yes!" Isn't there going

to be one where I circle “no?”

JEN: (*Laughs*) Sorry. I guess it’s boring to circle only “yes” answers. I didn’t think about that. This form is just to say that we have talked about these things and, since we have, you answer “yes.” Okay, let’s do the last question. Then we can finally get onto the interview.

STEVEN: (*Sighs*) Fi-nal-ly!

JEN: This one says “Jen has told me that if I have any worries or concerns I can talk to her about them.” You circle “yes” or “no.”

STEVEN: (*Sits up straight, wrinkles his nose and eyebrows, looks like he is thinking*) Hmm. Umm. Um.

JEN: (*Curiously*) Is this a hard one, d’you think?

STEVEN: (*Still looks like he is thinking hard*) Umm, I don’t know. This is a tricky one.

JEN: (*Gently*) Oh, okay. So why is this one tricky? We talked about how you could tell me if you had any worries and, um... (*voice trails off*).

STEVEN: Yeah, but. Well—(*pauses*). Auntie told me not to say any of the bad stuff with you.

JEN: Oh, she did?

STEVEN: Yeah, she doesn’t want me to talk about the bad stuff too much (*voice gets quieter*), so... I don’t know.

JEN: Okay, so you don’t know if it’s okay to talk about some of the things you might be worried about with me?

STEVEN: (*Nods*) Yeah. And it’s confusing too because sometimes Dad tells me lots of secrets too.

JEN: Yeah, that *can* be so confusing, hey? (*Animated voice*) Sometimes people tell you secrets and you don’t even want to know them!

STEVEN: Yeah.

JEN: Well, when we are talking, if we get to something you don't feel okay talking about, you can just stop. You don't need to say anything that makes you feel bad or worried, okay?

STEVEN: Yes, okay. Can we get started? Cuz what does this button do (*picks up the recorder*)?

JEN: Yeah, let's get started. That's the record button. You can press it and then we could say our names and listen to them to test it out.

STEVEN: (*Perks up*) Okay. Just press it?

JEN: (*Nods*) Yep.

(STEVEN *turns the recorder on*).

JEN: Okay, so it's recording now. You can see it is counting down (*points to the number panel on the recorder*). Um, do you want to say your name?

STEVEN: (*Looks serious and speaks into the recorder*) Steven.

JEN: (*Speaks directly into the recorder too*) I'm here with Steven in the playroom. It is Tuesda—no, Wednesday. Is it Wednesday, Steven?

STEVEN: Yes, Wednesday.

JEN: Okay, it's Wednesday June 7<sup>th</sup>—

STEVEN: (*Interrupts*) The 7<sup>th</sup> of June Oh-Six.

JEN: Exactly. So, we're in the playroom. Oh, I already said that.

(STEVEN *laughs*).

JEN: So, Steven... (*voice trails off*).

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: This interview is about the story of your life. You don't need to tell me

everything that's ever happened to you... just pick out the bits and pieces in your life that are important to you. Try to concentrate on the stuff that you think is special, or important, or tells about the person that you are.

(STEVEN *looks overwhelmed and worried. Laughs nervously*).

JEN: Oh, don't worry. Sorry, did that make it sound hard? I'll guide you through it. You can answer as much or as little as you like.

STEVEN: (*Looks serious*) Yes.

JEN: Okay, so the first thing is to start thinking about your life as a story. You know how stories have different characters?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: And settings and scenes?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: And good and bad times, good and bad guys... that kind of stuff?

(STEVEN *nods*).

JEN: Your own life story might have a lot of these things. It might have heaps of chapters too. Do you think you might be able to divide your whole life into some chapters?

STEVEN: (*Looks puzzled*) I don't know. Hmm. I don't know.

JEN: Yeah, okay. I think that was a bit hard to understand actually; I didn't explain it very clearly. Um, let's just start with this: How did your life begin? That could be your first chapter. Chapter One in the story of Steven's life... (*voice trails off in a leading way*).

STEVEN: Oh, it's when I burnt myself. My chest.

JEN: (*Eyes widen*) Ow! Were you a baby then?

STEVEN: I think I was about two, yes.

JEN: How did it happen?

STEVEN: (*Matter of factly*) Because my mum and dad weren't watching me. And I was by the jug. And it was on. (*Takes a noticeable breath*) And I pulled the cord.

JEN: Oh, yikes! Can you remember it happening?

STEVEN: (*Pulls up his shirt and points to his chest*) Yes. It used to be all over there.

JEN: What was there? The burn?

STEVEN: Yeah. I used to have a mark there but it's gone now. Used to be there when I was still six though.

JEN: It must have really hurt.

STEVEN: I was crying. It was on medium anyway. Medium-hot when I pulled the cord.

JEN: What happened after you pulled the cord? Did your mum and dad come in?

STEVEN: My mum and dad, um, heard me cry and they came in.

JEN: Did you have to go to the hospital?

STEVEN: No, I was alright. It was just a little scar. Right there (*points to his chest*).

JEN: So is this one of the first memories you have of your life?

STEVEN: No.

JEN: Oh, well what's your first memory?

STEVEN: When I swallowed a dollar coin. I swallowed one when I was only a little baby and my nana did something with my head (*laughs*); tried to get it out.

JEN: Whoa! Can you remember putting the coin in your mouth?

STEVEN: Yes. I could breathe but it couldn't, like, go up (*demonstrates choking*

*for air*). I had to go to the doctor, I think. I think I—(*pauses*). I think I swallowed it cuz—(*stops himself*). Do you know how they have those chocolate coins? I thought it was a chocolate coin (*laughs*).

JEN: (*Laughs*) Oh yeah. That's funny. (*Curiously*) So that's the first thing you can remember about your life?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: How old do you think you were?

STEVEN: Two.

JEN: Okay, great. So, let's talk about some of the happiest times in your life. Is there one time in particular in your life when you felt the most happy? You just had the best feelings ever...?

STEVEN: (*Without pausing*) When I played North Straight at Ashhurst School with bare feet.

JEN: Oh, wasn't that today?

STEVEN: Yes!

JEN: (*Exclaims*) So today was one of the best days in your whole life?!

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Cool! Well, how come the game was so good today?

STEVEN: Because I almost got a 'try.' (*Pauses*) But my coach said to pass it.

JEN: Ahh. So did that make you feel pretty good?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Awesome. So what were you thinking during the game? What else made it such a special game for you?

STEVEN: Well, I was thinking that I got to see how well my players were. Because they're all from Under-9's, not Under-8's. There was one person—(*pauses*). No,

there were two people from my team that I knew already. I knew how they played.

JEN: Oh, so was it the first time you played with the Under-9 team?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Wow, that sounds exciting. You must be a good player. (*Pauses*). So why do you love rugby so much?

STEVEN: Because, um, you can play for the Reps.

JEN: Okay, yep. Do you know anyone who plays for them?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Who's that?

STEVEN: Ty, my brother. He's a Rep.

JEN: (*Looks interested*) Oh, so he's really good at rugby too?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Is he kind of an inspiration for you or, you know, a role model?

STEVEN: No, my Uncle Brian is. He's a rugby player too. He's a Rugby League player. (*Pauses*). And my dad plays for Linton and Marist.<sup>32</sup>

JEN: He plays on two teams?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: So rugby is really in your family?

STEVEN: Yes, except for my sister. She plays netball. Cuz some girls play rugby but not that many.

JEN: Oh yeah. (*Pauses*). So, when you're an adult and you're thinking back on your first eight years of life...so all of your years so far...what do you think is going to be your most important memory of being a child?

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<sup>32</sup>Team names have been changed to protect identities.

STEVEN: (*With certainty*) When I won against Feilding. Or Linton, I mean. Linton. I got two tries for me and five tries from Mikah. Because I kept on setting them up for him.

JEN: Oh, cool. So that really stands out as important for you?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Well, how did you feel?

STEVEN: Good.

JEN: Yep. And was anyone there to see you?

STEVEN: My dad. He was there. And not Auntie Shannon.

JEN: So does your dad come to watch a lot of your games?

STEVEN: He *always* watches my games. He never stops. Before I've got ten tries.

JEN: Whoa. You must be really good.

STEVEN: In touch, I am.

JEN: Okay, wow. So how does it make you feel that your dad comes to watch?

STEVEN: Happy.

JEN: Yeah, I bet.

STEVEN: (*Looks up at the wall, distracted*) Those are still up there (*points to the faces on the Feelings Chart*).

JEN: Yep, we still use them with the new *Dragonflies* kids.

STEVEN: (*Looks thoughtful*) Oh. (*Pauses*). Can I—(*puts finger over the stop button on the voice recorder*). This is getting pretty long.

JEN: Are you bored? Should we take a little break?

STEVEN: I'm not really bored, but can I just get another drink?

JEN: Oh yeah, sure. What would you—

STEVEN: (*Interrupts*) Just water. I'll just fill it up here (*takes his cup to the sink in the playroom, fills it up, then sits down again. Picks up the voice recorder and examines it*). Yep, it's counting still.

JEN: Oh good. Okay, since we talked about happy times, maybe we should talk about unhappy times too even though that's not as fun. Do you have a really low point in your life story? A time when you felt the worst? Maybe the most sad, or the most scared, or most guilty?

STEVEN: When I banged my head on the ground.

JEN: What happened?

STEVEN: Um, I mean on the door. I got brain—I mean, I almost got brain damage.

JEN: Oh, ow. So what happened?

STEVEN: Um, well, my brother went to tackle me and the door was open and I fell backwards.

JEN: Did he mean to hurt you or—

STEVEN: (*Interrupts*) No, me and him, we were playing.

JEN: He must have felt bad then, I guess?

STEVEN: No.

JEN: (*Questioningly*) You don't think so?

STEVEN: No, cuz he was, like, going like this to me (*shakes his head*), trying to tell me what to do. Like, "go like that" (*shakes head*), he was saying. Cuz I had, like, a headache.

JEN: Oh, okay. So he thought you could sort of shake it off?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Did you have to go to the doctor then?

STEVEN: No. It's still in my head. Up here (*points*).

JEN: Really? When did it happen?

STEVEN: When I was leaving for school. It was on Thursday. I think it was the 31<sup>st</sup> of May. Oh, and I banged my head before a rugby practice too.

JEN: (*Exclaims*) Oh no! So do you always have accidents like this?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Sounds like it!

STEVEN: (*Looks exasperated*) Cuz I even got my head banged today when I went to tackle.

JEN: Really?

(STEVEN *shakes his head with a bewildered look on his face*).

JEN: (*Flips through the interview guide sheet*) So when you look back on your life, Steven, can you think of a time when a lot of really big things happened and you went through a lot of change?

STEVEN: (*Looks thoughtful*) Yes, when I came here and found out that you're not meant to hit.

JEN: (*Curiously*) When you came to this programme, do you mean?

STEVEN: Yes. *Dragonflies*.

JEN: Oh, okay. So does this tell you something about yourself?

STEVEN: Yes, that I changed a lot. Because I used to always hit my sister.

JEN: And now you don't?

STEVEN: No.

JEN: What do you do now when you get angry at her?

STEVEN: I don't get angry at her anymore. I just settle down.

JEN: Oh, wow. That's so good. (*Smiles*) That's awesome to hear actually. You must be so proud of yourself cuz that's not an easy thing to do, is it? Just to settle down, I mean.

STEVEN: It's easier now.

JEN: (*Curiously*) I guess when you practice, it gets easier?

STEVEN: Yes. I go down by my brother when I feel real *real* angry too. And just play Playstation, of course.

JEN: So you distract yourself?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Sounds good. (*Pauses*). So, what's the biggest challenge you've had to face in your life? I mean, what's the biggest thing you've had to deal with?

STEVEN: Um, when I've had to deal with putting up with my sister. When she's annoying me. Not to hit her. Cuz sometimes she's really annoying.

JEN: So how *do* you put up with it?

STEVEN: I put up with it by settling down and cooling off, by distracting myself.

JEN: Has anyone helped you to deal with this?

STEVEN: My brother and my mum and dad. And Auntie. And Nana did. They've all been helping me. And Summer, my baby cousin, too. She distracts me by playing (*laughs*). And my other cousin too. He's a Pakeha. We always have play fights.

JEN: Oh, that's great you have so many people to help you in your life. Has there been one person, or a few people—maybe these people—who has had the most positive influence in your life? Like, the best influence? Someone who has made a really good difference for you?

STEVEN: Oh, everyone in my family.

JEN: Everybody?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Has anyone in particular taught you a lot about life, or just all of them?

STEVEN: My brother. And my sister. And my dad. My mum. My cousin. My nana, before she died. And (*pauses*). Yeah. Everyone.

JEN: And what about negative influences? Has anyone had a bad influence on you or in your life?

STEVEN: My sister. When I banged my head, she felt sorry.

JEN: (*Laughs a little*) Oh, okay, yeah. But, um, is there anyone who makes you feel bad, I guess, in your family?

STEVEN: (*Wrinkles his forehead, then smiles*) Um, no.

JEN: Oh, that's good.

STEVEN: (*Laughs and nods*) Mmm, yep.

JEN: So what are some of the most important things that you've learned in your life?

STEVEN: That not to hit anyone, not to damage yourself or hurt yourself, and never to worry about getting your head cut because you can get it fixed.

JEN: Those seem like really good lessons. So what are some of the most important things that, say, your mum has taught you?

STEVEN: She taught me how to tackle and defend in rugby.

JEN: Really? So she's good at rugby too?

STEVEN: Yeah, she used to play touch. And my dad, he teaches me how to tackle, defend, and how to step.

JEN: That's good, hey? (*Pause*). So now that you're living with your auntie, what kinds of things do you want or need from your mum?

STEVEN: For her to stop fighting and be fair, because when we left Mum's house we had to go first—me and my brother. It wasn't fair for us.

JEN: What do you mean that you had to go first?

STEVEN: Like, we had to go first to Auntie's and Olivia got all the treats. Like she got lollies and that.

JEN: Oh yeah, so that wasn't fair of your mum to send you and Ty first?

STEVEN: Yeah.

JEN: And what kinds of things do you want or do you need from your dad now?

STEVEN: I have everything from my dad.

JEN: Really?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: So he's really important to you?

STEVEN: Yes. And my mum.

JEN: Yeah.

STEVEN: (*Picks up voice recorder*). What's this for? That thing (*points to a button on recorder*).

JEN: It turns off the whole thing actually.

STEVEN: What about these (*points to more buttons*)?

JEN: This one (*points*), erases everything.

STEVEN: What does that mean?

JEN: It means it gets rid of it. It makes everything on the recorder disappear.

STEVEN: What does this say (*refers to digital images on recorder's screen*)?

JEN: Well, the recorder has a few different folders in it. That button sorts all the

files—like all the recordings of our talk now —into one folder. Another folder could have all the recordings from my talk with Olivia. And another folder could have someone else's, like Kerry's?

STEVEN: (*Eyes brighten*) Have you done hers?

JEN: Her interview?

STEVEN: (*Nods*) Yeah.

JEN: Yep and—

STEVEN: (*Interrupts, looking excited*) Jamie's?

JEN: Yep.

STEVEN: When did you do Kerry's?

JEN: Maybe two weeks ago.

STEVEN: How about Jamie's?

JEN: Same day. I did it at their house. I just went in their bedrooms. It was fun.

STEVEN: Did they have messy rooms?

JEN: No. They were pretty clean. Yeah, they were clean actually.

STEVEN: Mine's clean because I sleep with my brother and he's a clean person.

JEN: Oh, is he? Does he clean up your stuff too then?

STEVEN: No. We have to clean all our—like, he has to clean all mine, and I have to clean his. It's pretty different.

JEN: That sounds like a good strategy. (*Pauses*). So can I ask a few questions about the fighting in your family now?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Okay, thanks. So are there things that you have to do when you live with parents that fight that you don't like to do?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: What kinds of stuff do you have to do?

STEVEN: You have to hide from them because you could see some things flying toward you, like a chair. Cuz my mum and dad fight sometimes. Like, my dad throws chairs at my mum.

JEN: So if you're a kid, you need to get out of the way?

STEVEN: Yes, cuz kids, they could get damaged. Apart from my brother. He never gets damaged.

JEN: He doesn't?

STEVEN: No.

JEN: How come you say he doesn't get hurt?

STEVEN: Because he's a strong person. He has big muscles, of course. Big ones.

JEN: So just cuz he's bigger?

STEVEN: Yes. He's not that tall though and he's almost going on twelve. He's eleven.

JEN: Yeah, you are almost as tall as him, aren't you? I kind of think that you're going to be taller soon. Don't you think so?

STEVEN: (*Laughs*) Yeah. Because I'm almost up to my brother already.

JEN: Yeah, and you're only eight! (*Pauses*). Okay, so is there anything okay about living with fighting in your home?

STEVEN: No. It's all bad.

JEN: So you didn't learn anything from it that might be useful for you?

STEVEN: No.

JEN: How did things change for you when you went to live with your auntie?

STEVEN: It's changed from the fighting. Because my auntie and uncle don't fight. They just let us watch DVD's, or watch TV, or have pizza, or clean-up. And we have stuff to do at our home with them. Just to do chores and clean-up the house.

JEN: So, you're busier there?

STEVEN: Yeah.

JEN: Do you think it's right that you had to watch your mum and dad fight? I mean, do you think it is fair for kids to have to watch fighting in their homes?

STEVEN: No.

JEN: Why is it unfair?

STEVEN: (*Pauses, wrinkles eyebrows*) I don't know actually.

JEN: Maybe cuz it's hard for kids to watch people they love fight?

STEVEN: Yes (*laughs*). It is.

JEN: Did you ever feel ashamed about the fighting in your family?

STEVEN: No.

JEN: Oh, that's good. And how do you get by, you know, day-to-day, when you're a kid who lives with fighting in his home?

STEVEN: I don't know really, cuz it's hard to understand.

JEN: Hmm, yeah. When you wake up, do you know if there will be a fight? Like, how do you know when a fight is going to happen?

STEVEN: When my dad gets up and when he's angry.

JEN: So can he just sometimes wake up angry?

STEVEN: Yes. He wakes up and tells us to go away.

JEN: Then you know he's in an angry mood?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: What happens when he gets angry? Does he sort of explode?

STEVEN: No, he starts to, um, go back to sleep.

JEN: Mmm. So what does it feel like when you watch a fight?

STEVEN: It's scary because my mum could get whacked and fall on the concrete and cut her head. You get worried about her.

JEN: Has anything really bad ever happened to her?

STEVEN: No.

JEN: She's made it through okay, so far?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Oh, good. So do you feel anything in your body when you watch a fight, like does your heart beat extra fast?

STEVEN: No, it beats slow. Slower, yes.

JEN: Why's that?

STEVEN: Because I go hide under the bed like my sister does and we're so still. (*Pauses*). Sometimes I just stand there and watch it though.

JEN: What's it like when you stand there and watch it?

STEVEN: It looks scary. Cuz your mum and you could get hurt. Or your dad could get hurt. He could fall back without even knowing it. When he's walking.

JEN: (*Softly*) Yeah. Yeah. So how do you deal with these feelings, like these worries?

STEVEN: I don't know.

JEN: When the fight stops, do your bad feelings go away?

STEVEN: No, they're still here. I still have them.

JEN: Okay. So what do you do about them?

STEVEN: I try to ignore them by playing Playstation, but it never works.

JEN: Mmm, that's too bad.

STEVEN: Are we almost finished?

JEN: Yep, just a few more questions. Is it hard to talk about the fighting?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: What's hard about it?

STEVEN: I don't know. It's just hard to say what happened.

JEN: Yeah, so if I'd seen it too, would it be easier to tell me about it?

STEVEN: No, it's just hard. It would be hard. Cuz things tick by, like my mum and stuff too. I can't remember all the stuff from when I was only a little kid, like when I was only 5 months.

JEN: Yeah. I think I understand. (*Long pause*).

STEVEN: Do you rewind that (*points to rewind button*)?

JEN: Yeah, I will rewind it later to listen to everything.

(STEVEN *laughs*).

JEN: Let's talk about your future. Is that okay?

STEVEN: Yep (*nods*).

JEN: Okay, so, when you think about your future, what would you like to happen? What kinds of goals and dreams would you like to come true as you get older?

STEVEN: That I get to the All Blacks. And get to maybe the Blues or the Hurricanes and, if not, the Waratahs—they're the Warriors.

JEN: So you want to do a lot of things with your rugby? Get on a good rugby team?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Anything else? What about... what kind of family would you like to have?

STEVEN: A Māori family.

JEN: Oh, so that's important to you?

STEVEN: Yes. Or Samoan.

JEN: Oh, yeah. So how come that's important?

STEVEN: Because there's two different people in my family that I really love. My dad and mum are different. My dad's a Māori and my mum's a Samoan. And so my mum's family is Samoan and my dad's family is Māori.

JEN: So you'd like your own family to be like that too?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Mmm, cool. So do you think you're going to have a wife?

STEVEN: No, I don't want to get a wife. I'm not going to get one.

JEN: (*Laughs*) You're not going to get a wife? (*Teases*) Are you sure?

STEVEN: (*Laughs*) Yes.

JEN: How come?

STEVEN: Because. (*Pauses*). Girls are annoying (*laughs*).

JEN: Haha, so you'd just rather avoid it?

STEVEN: Yeah, and live by myself.

JEN: Yeah. So is there anything that you are afraid might happen to you in the future? Something you don't want to happen?

STEVEN: I don't want to get killed. Because there's a lot of murderers out there.

JEN: Is that something you worry about a lot?

STEVEN: Yes, all the time. Because when it's dark time, there could be anybody

sneaking around.

JEN: You do have to be careful sometimes. Hmm. (*Pauses*). Well, maybe you can give some advice now, and then we can end this interview.

(STEVEN *sighs and looks bored*).

JEN: I'm sorry it's gone on so long. I guess you're pretty bored?

STEVEN: (*Smiles and perks up. Shakes head "no"*) What kind of advice?

JEN: Well, since you have a lot of knowledge about family violence, I was wondering... (*voice trails off*). If you could pass on some of your knowledge, some advice to other kids who might be living with a lot of fighting in their homes, what would you say to them?

STEVEN: That, to... (*pauses*). Um, if you're in a fight, to go away and ignore it because you could get hurt, or you could get hit when your dad goes to throw something, or you could get hurt by tripping up when you are running. And, yeah. That's my ideas. Should I stop it (*looks at tape recorder*)?

JEN: Not quite yet. What would you say to mums who are in a violent relationships now?

STEVEN: I don't know. (*Looks thoughtful, then pauses*). I don't know cuz I don't say anything to adults. I just keep quiet.

JEN: You do?

STEVEN: Yes, like, because if we're younger, they can see you but you're not to be heard. Cuz that's what my auntie said.

JEN: Really? So you believed that was true?

STEVEN: Yes. And I listened to it.

JEN: But, sometimes, do you think it is important to speak up even if you're young?

STEVEN: No.

JEN: What if someone—an adult, like maybe even your mum—was getting really hurt? Do you think it would be okay for you to call the police or something then?

STEVEN: (*Casually*) Nah, that's not my job. That's my brother's and sister's job.

JEN: Oh, I see. Is that because they're a bit older?

STEVEN: Yes, cuz there's a lot of murderers where I used to live. There's heaps of murderers.

JEN: That's scary.

STEVEN: There's more murderers than in the biggest country in the world.

JEN: Really?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: Well there *are* quite a lot of violent things that happen here. Hmm, well, what if you *could* talk to an adult... what if you could talk to a mum that you knew was living with a lot of fighting from her partner? Can you think of anything you might say to her, just if you could?

STEVEN: Um (*pauses*). Umm (*pauses again*). I do not know what to say. Cuz it's really hard.

JEN: That's okay. What would you like to say to *your* mum?

STEVEN: I don't know because I don't get to say anything because my sister always talks to her and when I try to talk to my mum, my sister butts in.

JEN: Oh? Is that annoying?

STEVEN: Yes, but I just go away.

JEN: Okay. Well what would you say to violent fathers? I bet you have some advice for them? This is the last question too.

STEVEN: Ummm, no. I just don't really know. It's really hard.

JEN: Yeah, it is really hard. Well, if they knew what you were thinking, maybe it

would make a difference—

STEVEN: (*Interrupts*) Yes. It would *actually* make a difference if I told my dad not to fight but I'm scared to because he could ignore me and he could hurt me. Cuz sometimes he hurts me.

JEN: Okay, yeah. So it's pretty scary to talk to him about it?

STEVEN: Yes.

JEN: How has he hurt you?

STEVEN: I don't know. Because sometimes when I— (*pauses*). When last year... (*voice trails off*). Before I came to this programme and I hit my sister, well... She hit me once and that really made me tick. And she started running to Mum, and so I pushed her into the cabinet, and then my dad hit me.

JEN: Okay, I see.

STEVEN: And I had a mark on me.

JEN: Oh, hmm. So you don't want that to happen to you again?

STEVEN: No.

JEN: So you don't want to talk to him about the fighting?

STEVEN: No.

JEN: Okay, yeah. Could you talk to any other dads who were violent?

STEVEN: Nah. I don't think so.

JEN: (*Sits up and smiles*) Well, Steven, I think we are *finally* done. Thank you so *so* much for talking to me and sharing so many of your stories and experiences and ideas. You are awesome! Was it really boring for you?

STEVEN: (*Smiles*) No. No, it was good. And now my auntie says we might get Fish 'n Chips before we go home.

JEN: Mmm, yum.

STEVEN: Oh, can I turn it off now (*points to recorder*)?

(JEN *nods* and STEVEN *turns off the recorder. They walk out of the playroom together, talking about their weekend plans*).

### Reflections: Act III

All narratives are partial and provisional. As Kiesinger (1995) notes, “lived experience [is] contextualized and situated, shaped by time, place, attitude, emotion, past experience, and the listener. As such, there is not one story, but rather a number of possible stories within which experience and identity can be constructed in a number of different ways” (p. 237-238). Act III represents the particular stories that Steven selected to highlight when accounting for his life in our final conversation. In turn, I make my own selection now by drawing attention to four themes from Steven’s narrative for discussion: Accidents and injuries; secrets and silences; connecting to family through sport; and coping with family violence. I emphasise these themes in an effort to make some sense of how Steven makes sense of his life, and also to begin to identify some of the significant commonalities and differences in the life experiences of my research participants.

#### **Accidents and injuries, secrets and silences**

Scott, Jackson & Backett-Milburn (1998) suggest that “the social world of children is divided into safe and dangerous places, which has consequences for children’s use of space, where they are allowed to go, and the places they themselves feel safe in, frightened or excited by” (p. 6). Steven’s narrative speaks to some of the real and perceived dangers of growing up in a violent family in the Manawatu region of New Zealand. Many of the most memorable and important life events he recalls during our interview are of accidents and injuries, including his “worst memory” of falling through a door during a “play fight” with his brother and “almost getting brain damage.” Indeed, there *are* very real risks of physical injury for children who live in violent families. Straus and Gelles (1988) state there is a “perverse truth to the saying ‘There’s no place like home’ [as] violent crimes [occur] more frequent[ly] in the home than in any other setting” (Straus and Gelles, 1988, cited in Lund and Greene, 2003, p. 181). The association between child abuse and partner abuse is also well-established, as is a troubling link between children’s head injuries and complications with their healing (for example, cerebral infarct) in families where violence has also been identified (Bird, McMahan, Gilles, Senac, & Apthorp, 1987; Cohen, Kaufman, Myers, & Towbin, 1985; Ransom, Mann, Vavilala, Haruff, & Rivara, 2003; Suh,

David, Hopkins, Fajman, & Mapstone, 2001).

Curiously, Steven's preoccupation with memories of accidents and injuries, especially those which took place in his home, did not seem matched by equal *concern* for the dangers posed by his close family members, nor any indication that he was prepared or able to deal with them. By contrast, Steven considered one of his most important life lessons "never to worry about getting your head cut because you can get it fixed." His greatest fears were of more abstract community violence; specifically, "getting killed" by an unknown stranger. "When it's dark time," Steven explained, "there could be anybody sneaking around. . . there's a lot of murderers out there." Findings from Lund and Greene's (2003) research indicate "that mothers and children with a history of domestic violence and victimization may not be prepared to respond safely to either potentially violent or other emergency situations. Indeed, they may respond in a manner that actually increases their susceptibility to harm" (p. 190). I was concerned that Steven might have difficulty seeking help in an emergency situation, especially where it occurred in the so-called 'comfort and safety' of his own home, because he simply did not feel *entitled* to protect himself from fighting in this setting.

In addition, Steven made a number of comments throughout our final conversation that suggested he felt effectively silenced on the topic of domestic violence. For example, before our interview even began, he struggled with the final question of the consent form, explaining his conflict to me as follows: "Auntie told me not to say any of the bad stuff with you. . . she doesn't want me to talk about the bad stuff too much. . . it's confusing too, because sometimes Dad tells me lots of secrets too." Indeed, despite the increased media attention family violence has received in New Zealand over the past four years, it is still commonly believed to be one of the country's "deeper and darker secrets" (Dalley, 2004, p. 175). Shannon's caveat to Steven to avoid discussing "the bad stuff" in his life is reflective of this attitude. For Shannon, as for many New Zealanders, domestic abuse is—and always has been—an "inviolable" family secret (Kitzinger and Kitzinger, 1989, p. 87). It seems important to point out here that children will never be in a position to promote their rights when they continue to be silenced by powerful discourses—such as, 'children should be seen and not heard'—still commonly perpetuated in society at large. In addition, Steven's concerns about the secrets he has been asked to keep highlights the "intolerable

burden” adults sometimes impose on children “when they confide ‘grown-up’ secrets and invoke secrecy in order to protect adults” (Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 1989, p. 88).<sup>33</sup>

On a related note, it was challenging for Steven to think of general advice in our interview for mothers experiencing family violence or fathers perpetuating abuse. “I do not know what to say. Cuz it’s really hard,” Steven told me, “When you’re younger they [adults] can see you but you’re not to be heard. That’s what my auntie said and I believe her and I listened to her.” Steven continued: “It would actually make a difference if I told my dad not to fight but I’m scared to because he could ignore me and he could hurt me. Cuz sometimes he hurts me.” Thus, while Steven seemed to believe he had the *potential* to influence change in his father’s behaviour—likely because of the meaning he ascribed to their relationship—he was also fearful: What if it didn’t work? What if he was actually ignored or, worse, hurt?

Children are amongst the most powerless and oppressed groups in an adult world. Invariably, adult power means that a child’s right to voice, or agency, or to advocate on his or her own behalf, is usually undermined or subverted by adults who “control in the best interests of the young person<sup>34</sup>...[or] claim expertise...in relation to education, health or welfare, for example” (James et al., 1998, p. 144). Alice Miller (1988) reminds us though that the knowledge older people possess often has “precious little to do with wisdom” and even more succinctly, “advanced age has nothing to do with the *value* of a person’s experiences” (p. 155). When a child like Steven, however, is dependent on adults (especially his caregivers) for their advice and protection because of his age, it is understandable that he might willingly sacrifice his right to articulate his opinions even if he believes he “knows better” (Miller, 1988, p. 155). The essential imperative, therefore, is that adults consider the implications of the discourses and strategies they invoke in order to ‘protect children.’ For example, Shannon’s request to Steven to refrain from revealing the “bad stuff” in their family was ultimately benevolent. She was concerned about keeping Steven physically and emotionally safe and, as Steven himself indicated, her fears may be well-grounded: It might actually be dangerous for him to talk to his father about his violent behaviour. However,

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<sup>33</sup>As Mullender et al. (2002) argue it is also notable that where children are given the opportunity to talk to some who believes, values, and listens to their opinions on domestic violence, “it matters a great deal to [them]...they gain from being able to talk about their feelings, what they have been through, and how to make sense of it” (p. 214).

<sup>34</sup>Of course, according to adult standards and opinions.

“in trying to present ourselves as children’s protectors” adults often “masquerade as omnipotent. Far from protecting children, this may leave them overwhelmed by adult power” (Kitzinger and Kitzinger, 1989, p. 267). Thus, it is fundamental that adults reflect on what they are teaching children about autonomy, authority, power, and independence—and how they are exercised—when they ask children to keep quiet about some of the most important issues in their lives.

### **“Dad always watches my games:” Connecting to family through sport**

Reflecting on Steven’s narrative in Act III, his passion for rugby is easily identified. Rugby games are a significant opportunity for Steven to showcase his talents and, in fact, rugby plays an important role in shaping Steven’s overall sense of self as a strong, confident, and skilful individual. Significantly, Steven also feels a deep connection to his family through rugby. His mother taught him “how to tackle and defend in rugby” and Steven considers this amongst “the most important things” he has ever learned from her. Similarly, Steven connects with his father, brother, and uncles through rugby. He is proud of their individual talents and successes in the sport and has absolute faith in his father’s interest in and support of his own rugby: “He [Dad] always watches my games,” Steven remarked, “He never stops.” One of Steven’s life dreams is to continue to excel at rugby and play on one of the top teams in New Zealand: “I want to get to the All Blacks or the Blues or the Hurricanes or, if not, the Waratas.”

As a result of rugby’s social significance as New Zealand’s national sport, there is an interesting body of research in the country which considers its role in the production of gendered identities. Richard Pringle and Pirkko Markula (2006) point to a continuing trend in the field of sports sociology to report that “heavy-contact sports,” such as rugby, “encourage” men to subscribe to “the values of toughness, competition, pain tolerance and physical dominance” (p. 131). In turn, these values are believed to promote a “dominant” and “problematic” form of masculinity “that contribute[s] to male privilege in society, the relative poor health of males, the marginalization and denigration of other masculinities (particularly gay males), and the promotion of violence against females” (“Rugby re-think,” 2004, n.p.). Pringle and Markula’s book, *Foucault, Sport and Exercise* (2006), offers a contrasting view,

however, which considers multiple and competing discourses about rugby in New Zealand. Pringle concludes, in his PhD thesis and book with Markula, that while rugby shapes many New Zealand boys' (and men's) ideas about 'what it means to be manly,' these values are largely questioned, adapted, and re-considered as individuals grow up (Pringle, 2003; Pringle & Markula, 2006). My research delves little into the study of sport on identity; however, Pringle's research findings are relevant to an attitude I regularly encountered throughout my PhD research—namely, that it is 'risky' for children from violent homes to participate in rugby because of the sport's potential to reinforce violent behaviour.<sup>35</sup>

My discussions with Steven and other boys I met in the *Dragonflies Programme* suggested that rugby and other organised sport had the potential for greater benefit than harm partly because—where properly mentored, of course—it provided structure and focus for a boy's competitiveness and aggressiveness. Gurian (1996) suggests that organised sport can offer a structured outlet which is akin to “honoring” the “natural physicality” of boys (p. 47). For Steven, certainly, rugby is a forum where he is 'allowed' to compete and perform well and this fuels his sense of self-worth. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for Steven though, rugby offers a rare opportunity for emotional closeness and bonding with a larger group of males, including his father, uncles, brother, teammates, and coaches.

### **“Children have to hide:” Coping with family violence**

Over the course of our one-year relationship, Steven's life changed in many significant ways. When we first met, he had recently moved to his Auntie Shannon's house. In general, Steven was 'busier' at Shannon's house, not to mention safer. He had new social activities there, as well as responsibilities and chores, all of which seemed to help him move on from the fighting he had experienced. Rather than dwelling in the past and re-living the details of the fights he had witnessed, Steven explained it was hard to talk about the violence in part because life had gone on or, in his words, “things tick by.”

Steven also realised during our final interview that he had “changed a lot” as a result of attending the *Dragonflies Programme*. He commented, “I changed a

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<sup>35</sup>I encountered this attitude especially often when talking to social workers and family violence service-providers about my research.

lot... when I came here and found out that you're not meant to hit... because I used to always hit my sister... I don't get angry at her anymore. I just settle down." Ultimately Steven learned that anger does not necessarily entail or result in hitting. He self-consciously employed many of the strategies we discussed in the *Dragonflies* groups to help him deal with his anger and his perseverance paid off: "It's easier now," Steven reflected. In this regard, Steven always gave careful consideration to the suggestions and options we discussed for coping with family violence in the *Dragonflies Programme*. He was comfortable asking for and receiving advice and help. He was also clearly willing to relinquish some aspects of his old self—such as his identity as a "fighter," for example—in order to transform or grow into the person he preferred to become. In my opinion, based on McCallister (2004), Steven possessed two essential elements for "the transformation of self: awareness of possibility [and] also a desire to undertake the journey toward the possible" (p. 458).

Overall, Steven appears to be well-equipped to cope with the violence in his family; he is highly reflective, emotionally competent, self-confident, and analytical. He also has the relatively unique ability—at least amongst my research participants—to selectively recognise and focus on the positive qualities possessed by each of his family members. In contrast to other participants, for example, Steven generally had very positive feelings about his family overall. He believed everyone in his immediate and extended families helped him deal with his life challenges, whether intentionally or not.<sup>36</sup> When I asked Steven to identify someone in particular who had made a positive difference in his life, he either could not or didn't want to. Instead, he listed everyone in his family for they had all made him feel good in different ways, at different times. Steven was also particularly cautious to be fair to all of his family members. When he told me he had "everything" from his father, for example, I commented, "He must be really important to you." Steven's reply was, "Yes. *And* my mum," thus emphasising, I believe, that he loved his mother and father equally despite recognising the different roles they played in his life and even, perhaps, despite forgiving or excusing his father's role in the fighting more.

The development of one's identity or sense of self is, of course, always fluid, "changing in relation to evolving standards and interpersonal connections" (McCallister, 2004, p. 431). However, 'self' emerges, at least in part, "through imitative

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<sup>36</sup>For example, Steven suggested his "baby cousin" helped him just by distracting him.

behaviour” (McCallister, 2004, p. 438). Bruner (1996) suggests that “imitation is culture’s mechanism for reproducing itself, for solving problems and overcoming obstacles” (cited in McCallister, 2004, p. 438). It is this “tendency to mimic and imitate as a means to accomplish goals—to adopt and adapt others’ behaviors and perspectives” (McCallister, 2004, p. 438)—that is relevant to the processes by which Steven makes the most and best of his family. In effect, Steven chooses to connect with the positive traits he feels he shares with or can imitate in the significant people in his life. For example, he ascribes meaning and significance to his father’s talents at rugby partly because he sees the same qualities in himself.

It is possible that Steven is simply unable to see his father’s faults or, alternatively, that he deliberately downplays the abusive behaviour and inconsistent parenting because it is too hurtful. This view, however, implies a naivety or ignorance that I simply don’t believe represents Steven accurately. By contrast, Steven was always thoughtful and realistic about the violence he had witnessed in his family, and spoke with empathy and concern for his family when describing the experience of witnessing fighting. He seemed fully aware that his father—as well as his uncles, brother, and mother—were abusive and violent at times and, at least by the time of our final interview, he knew that he did not want to be abusive to women in his own relationships. Thus, the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* provided a forum for him to think about the person he wanted to become and he made a self-conscious decision to focus on connecting with the ‘good’ or ‘positive’ qualities in his mentors, rather than attempting to imitate their ‘bad’ (abusive) behaviour.

Act IV, the final in the play, provides additional insight into Steven’s family and sibling relationships, but from his sister Olivia’s perspective.

## **Audience Briefing: Act IV**

The final act of the play is a monologue ‘performed’ by Olivia. It has been constructed from the transcript of our final research conversation, although it is not a verbatim account of the interview. I have edited the order of Olivia’s speech to maintain its narrative flow. These changes are minor and do not affect the meaning of Olivia’s account. She easily and enthusiastically assumed the storytelling role and, in fact, guided our conversation. For these reasons, I have also removed myself from this act of the play; my presence and role was less important to the way the conversation unfolded.

Act IV positions my research participants as meaningful actors and articulate, intelligent, sensitive, and resilient individuals. These threads are followed in the summary reflections and in Chapter 4 as well.

### Act IV: Olivia's Story

*(An afternoon in June, 2006. Large lounge room with an oversized armchair front centre. Skipping rope on the ground next to the chair. Guitar in a stand on other side of chair. Armchair and immediately adjacent area well-lit; rest of the stage in darkness. Olivia stands a couple of metres in front of the armchair, still in the spotlight, spinning two poi<sup>37</sup> in split-time. She crosses one arm over the other, then passes the poi over her head three times on each side).*

OLIVIA:

*(Voice bright and cheerful, counts the beats of the poi)* One —two—three. *(Looks up and smiles)* Jen asked me if I would help her with her research and I was like “Of course I would. Puhh-lease *(places her arms on her hips)*. I love helping people out” *(flops down happily into the armchair and places the poi on the ground beside her)*. I am going to tell you the story of my life. *(Eyes light up)* Isn't that cool? I get to be the storyteller of my own life. When Jen told me this, I just said “Yes, that would be *sooo* cool.” It sounded awesome. My life is one big, huge, gi-normous story. It's got heaps of chapters. *(Sits up straight in the chair)* A lot of them are about my family. My family is so important to me. *(Takes a big breath)* I have four brothers but only two that I know very, *very* well—Steven and Tyrell. The others don't live with me so I don't really know them, unfortunately. Steven, well, he is just good. He plays with me a lot and he helps me sometimes, but not al—*(pauses)*. Well, he is also a little bit annoying, because *(looks up with knowing eyes)*... you know? *(Sighs with exasperation)* Boys! My other brother, Ty, he's the second fastest person in our whole school. He helps me and he's just so fun to be around. I love my brothers. They help me with all sorts. Oh, one time, my little brother fell down the stairs in his walkie-chair-thing and chipped his tooth. I was just, like, devastated *(throws her arms in the air in an over-dramatic fashion)*. I thought he was going to die *(laughs)*. I was just panicking. But he isn't dead *(laughs again)*. He's alive and healthy and fit, just like me. *(With an adult-like tone)* We must be something else really. Okay,

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<sup>37</sup>Poi is “a light ball on a string of varying length which is swung or twirled rhythmically to sung accompaniment” (<http://www.Māoridictionary.co.nz>).

okay, I better hurry up. I always love talking.

*(Lights dim. OLIVIA's expression is more somber and tone of voice more serious)*  
 My mother *(sighs)*. My mum is my netball coach. We practice at school every week for netball. She does help me with that, and she comes to my games. I guess she helps me with a lot of stuff, but she isn't always there for me. She is— *(stops sentence abruptly)*. Well, I don't live with her. I live with my auntie. Mum, she just doesn't help me in heaps of stuff like she *should* do. Not like with day-to-day things. I just see her on the weekends, I guess. And— *(pauses)*. The choosing— *(pauses again)*. Choosing who to live with—Mum or Auntie—that was the worst thing of all. It's pretty sad I'm not with her, but it's also happy. If I lived with my mum still I would not have the same life I do now. Plump! If I lived with my mum again, my life would just plump like an upside-down pineapple cake. So I'm lucky to live with my auntie now.

*(OLIVIA gets up from the chair and picks up the poi again. She stretches out one arm and starts to make a circle above and below it with her poi)* This one's called the windmill. It's pretty easy. It's another 3-beat move. The only thing is, you have to watch out sometimes or the poi might hit you in the face *(laughs)*. That's happened to me before. *(Counts beats quietly to herself)*. Oh, I'm distracted *(puts the poi down)*. My auntie. . . well. . . *(walks in a circle on the stage, spotlight follows her)*. She is pretty much everything. *(Stops and looks directly at the audience)* Everything. She helps me with everything and anything. Like she guides me along my life—my present, my past, and my future. And she tells me what's right or wrong, in a tough-love way definitely, but that's good because sometimes we need some tough-love. *(Looks thoughtful. Returns to armchair as she speaks, putting the poi down again on the way)* Tough-love is a hard thing in my life actually. It's like, I always feel happy until I get some tough-love and then I am just sad and angry. It's very hard really. It's a lot of cursing. *(Mimics an angry face)* You get told off, yelled at. I understand *why* I get yelled at and I *know* I've been naughty, but I still don't like how tough-love feels at all. I just want to be happy. But, I guess, my life is not perfect. So, yeah, I just feel angry and depressed because I don't like tough-love. *(Pauses, then more cheerfully)* But I guess it's always the way to go. Anyway. . . *(voice trails off)*.

(*Voice brighter*) My auntie really helps me do all sorts. She is the manager of my netball team, she runs a scrap-booking group, she's very helpful to the community, and she helps me with my Māori. Every day we do karakia and we do whanau meetings. We always do that kind of stuff. So I love Mu—(*interrupts herself*). I call her mum. Because I'm always with her. (*Pauses*) I love when I go places with my family, like to the hot pools. The first time I went there it was, like, so exciting and butterflies and everything (*eyes widen*). And I was nervous too cuz it was a big place. I thought I was going to lose Mum and Auntie. We got there and we got our tickets and I always remember there was this pool and it had a bit where you could stand on (*gets off chair and stands on her tip-toes*). And then there was a deep part of the pool where I couldn't reach the bottom, so I stood on the edges. There used to be a big TV in there. (*Sits down again*) You could sit in the pool and watch TV. It was awesome. I just felt so excited and relaxed and happy and fun, all at the same time. Going there was kind of important to me because I guess who I am is a water rat. I love swimming. (OLIVIA *shifts position in the chair so that her legs straddle one arm and she is semi-reclined*).

When I'm older, I'm going to be an air hostess, or a mail woman, or a shop keeper, or a hair dresser, or a singer. (*Pauses*) Mostly a singer, I think. I would want to sing and be famous (*sings loudly*). I think I might enter a contest—New Zealand Idol. Actually, maybe not New Zealand Idol because when I'm older, like when I'm 23, I guess, I would like to go flatting with my friends in Australia too. We're going to make off to Australia. . . (*voice trails off*). I have a lot of choices for when I get older. (*Looks contemplative*) I guess I'll have a husband, cuz I want to have children. I'll just tell him to do the cooking, to help, watch the kids (*turns around in chair again and sits cross-legged now*). I hope he'll be nice, and shy, and pretty (*eyes light up*). But it's really about the inside, not the outside. I'd like to have a boy and a girl. And I think I would go for the names of (*pauses*). For Ocean or Destiny. For a boy, I'd call him Atreyal, cuz I really like that name. Or Maya. Cuz I like that name too, but only for a boy. (*Looks directly at the audience*) I don't want to have a husband who is abusive to me and who might beat up the children. And I don't want to be an early mother—have my kids when I'm about fifteen. And, um, I don't want to

end up broke and living in a shack or living on the streets. Oh, and I don't want to be shy. I want to be confident.

(OLIVIA *jumps off the chair again*) This is getting too long, isn't it? (*Paces on stage*) Okay, okay. My Māoridom. I love Māori—everything Māori. Like, I mean, it's my favourite thing in the whole wide world. There are several things that have to do with Māori at our school. There's writing in Māori. I know I'm good at that, so I do it heaps. And we have Te Reo on Thursdays, where we do fun Māori stuff, play Māori games, learn Māori. And we have guitar lessons with Whaea Hine. And I—(*picks up guitar next to armchair*). I learn the chords. Here, I'll play you a couple (OLIVIA *strums a short series of chords, then puts guitar back in its stand*). Sometimes at lunch, I help Whaea Hine with some kids that want to learn how to do the poi. And we also do kapa haka, like waiata-ā-ringa. It looks like this (*demonstrates arm and hand trembling*). I love Māori stuff because I get to do things that I know how to do, and I get to— (*pauses, rubs her head like she is thinking*). Well, I guess I get to feel good about myself. I get to do some solos here and there too. Singing, I mean. That's really hard. I take the lead bits... some of them anyway. You have to have quite a lot of courage for that but mostly you just need a loud voice (*laughs*). I just say to myself "I've got a loud voice" cuz, I mean, I do (*pauses*)... when I scream at my brothers (*laughs*). I scream at my brothers every day really cuz they're just annoying. (*Sighs in a joking way*) That's how brothers are sometimes. Brothers will be brothers.

(*Pauses, then walks over to the poi and picks them up again*) I have a lot of skills, like with the poi. I guess I was just born doing it; that's why it is a skill now. I know a lot of combinations for the poi and that's so cool—to get to show off my moves. Yeah, I love the poi. The poi is, like, so much me. This is my favourite poi that I've got here (*starts spinning her poi gracefully*). Poi is like my heart. It's got a beat, like boom-boom-boom-boom. We say "beat-intelligent-beat" when we practice. It's got a good beat. The poi is—(*stops sentence and looks up*). Well, I always dream about the poi. And performing. It's one of my favourite things in my sleep. It's definitely something special. (OLIVIA *continues to practice with the poi for a few moments, going through various combinations*).

Some of my other hobbies are skipping and scrapbooking and singing. I do singing lessons now that I'm at Auntie's place. And, yep— (*pauses briefly*). I've got netball too. That's one of my favourite hobbies. I play centre and I intercept, like, a million times in a whole game. Well, almost. I'm so cool (*laughs jokingly*). My friends don't know but my mum thinks I'm the star player of our team cuz I'm good at intercepting and that's an important part of the game. (*Exclaims*) Oh yeah, my friends! They are an important part of my life too. (*Sits down in the armchair*) I have heaps of fights with my friends. Almost every day (*sighs and slumps a little lower in the chair*). But we always be friends again. It's soooo weird. It's not just small arguments (*sits up straight and shakes head as if saying "no"*). They seem like gi-normous ones! Like, we have fights over little things, but they're pretty big fights. We have this funny time at school where we get, like, ten minutes to do something fun at the end of the day. We have fights about who wants to do it with who, out of the girls. It's like my friends want to do the fun time thing with me but I might have already asked someone else to do it with me. And then they don't want to be my friend and they just act all sad (*looks frustrated*). It just gets me angry because I don't know why—(*pauses*). (*Indignantly*) I'm not trying to be unfair and I told them I'd do it with them some other time and it's just, like, so weird like that. That's what kind of fights I have with them. What else is there? (*Pauses*) My friends *are* nice. Some of them are not really *really* nice, nice, nice, you know? But they're friends. Some of my friends are kind and special. Yes, special is the main word to call them, because they really *are* special. We like to play cheat, tag, dodgeball. We play everything. If I didn't have any friends, then I'd be very, very sad.

(*Looks solemn*) Okay, I should say some serious stuff now, I guess, like about the time when my nana died, cuz that's one of the low times in my life. I was so sad. I was about eight... (*voice trails off*). Yeah, it was 'bout two years ago. I came home from school one day and Mum told us—(*stops. Pauses*). We went in and we saw Nan and she was obviously gone. (*Voice quiet*) She was gone. She wasn't with us. I went to touch Nana and she was cold, cuz that's how they feel when they're gone. (*Looks up*) But her spirit was with us. I could feel it and it felt warm, so she was still with us a little. Mum was going through a rough time then and she was very upset

and sad. She was, like, pining for Nana. And then the worst of the worst happened when her, uh, sister died. I have to—(*looks uncomfortable*). Actually, I don't want anyone to know about that. (*Long pause, lights dim*).

(*Spotlight shines on OLIVIA in armchair again*) I don't like thinking about dying. I'm afraid to think about when I will lose my mum and my auntie. It's so sad, just the thought of losing them. I always stay up thinking about it and it's just not a good thought. Not at all. I guess it says something about who am I, because I worry about this. It shows that I am—(*pauses*). Well, that I do care. Some people think I don't. Like my friends and even my auntie sometimes say I don't care. (*Indignantly*) But I do care. I do have feelings. And I do know what is wrong and right and I really don't like it when people judge me for what I do. It's just, I make mistakes. But I do have emotions. I know she doesn't mean it when she says something like that, my auntie. She's just having a bad day or something. A bad day, just like me sometimes. Everyone has bad days. (*Big sigh*) One of the hardest things about life is actually just living, and dying, of course. Living a life means dying too and I don't want to die. Thinking about my childhood is sometimes hard too because I still want to be little. So, I guess, growing up is my biggest challenge. I just don't want to grow up and die, so I try to think happy thoughts. I think too that when I die I am going to be someone else again. (*Gets up from chair and starts to pace slowly*) My family helps me with this too. Like, I have a conversation on growing up with them sometimes and that's when Mum always says—(*stops*). Oh, not Mum, that's my auntie. (*Looks serious*) She always says that she helps me along the way and she does. (*Light shines a beam across the stage. OLIVIA walks through the light, as if on a path*) She always helps me with growing up. I know she'll be there for me. (*Pauses, then picks up a skipping rope next to the armchair and jumps a few times. Sits down again*) I just hope all the things I love will last forever, until I'm one hundred. I guess when I'm one hundred I'll like other things too, like sitting in my rocking chair. And knitting (*smiles*). Yes, knitting. And using my wheelchair with a remote control (*pretends to be driving in the armchair*). And sharing with my grandchildren some memories of when I was little. (*Pauses*).

Okay, just a few things about the fighting in my family, and then I think you'll

know the important stuff in my life. (*Looks directly in front of her*) When I lived with a lot of fighting, it was when I was with my mum. That's why I say my life would be flipped upside-down like a pineapple cake if I went back to live with her. (OLIVIA *rolls off the chair head first and attempts a head-stand*). Like this (*straining to speak*)...kind of. (*Laughs as she jumps back to her feet*) Mum was always fighting with my step-dad. Now I just have to deal with it on holidays and sometimes weekends. Not all the time. I want my mum to be able to be a good mum (*sits back down in armchair*). She needs some encouragement for that and a nice boyfriend. My step-dad's not that bad right now, but it's just cuz they are living with my other auntie so he doesn't show his true colours. I don't feel ashamed about the fighting, I just feel angry (*crosses her arms*). And if it happens again in front of me, I'll call the police. I don't know if I forgive my mum for it. Yes but no. (*Voice sounds angry*) It's very hard to forgive her. If I do, then she'll just do it again. She says she won't do it again, but it's hard to trust her. When you can't trust your mum, it's just sad. Awful. I don't know if she knows that I think this. I guess she does. I guess so. I can't talk to her about the fighting. She doesn't bring it up.

(*Stands up*) When I'm at mum's house, it's not scarier. It's just more comfortable at Auntie's. It's more like eggshells at Mum's (*walks on tip-toes at the front of the stage*). You can tell when a fight's going to happen because they don't talk and they don't be nice to each other. And when you watch a fight it feels awful. I feel hurt. And sad. And mad. (*Stands with hands on hips*) Yep, hurt and sad and mad. I try to deal with it by thinking of happy thoughts and doing happy things. Just trying to be positive. Definitely. (*Sits down*) It's hard to talk about this kind of stuff. I don't know why though (*looks puzzled, eyebrows wrinkle*). I'm not too sure. It just feels hard. It doesn't even feel right talking about it. And it's hard to put into words because a lot of things are happening at once. And there's a lot of feelings. Yes, very hard. (*Gives a half-smile*) Well, if I could give some other kids some advice, it would be this... (OLIVIA *stands up again and speaks loudly*): "Be strong. Be positive. Just don't think the worst." And to mums living with abuse right now, I'd say: "Get some help. Get away from the abuse. Get away. Just stop it so it won't get worse and find a place like Refuge." To dads that are violent, my advice is: "Stop being a coward, and beat up someone your own size, or your own age. You

could try.” Or, just: “Back off!” pretty much, “I don’t understand why you have to go pick on people. You’re just a coward cuz you don’t know how to act around ladies.” Something forceful.

*(Spins around a few times with arms out)* The fighting I’ve seen, at least it is something that’s behind me now. I have been able to move on because I’m strong and I know not to worry too much. I don’t know really how I became such a strong person. I guess people like my auntie have helped me. It’s very lucky I have her. Yes, very lucky. *(Pauses)* If I think of my whole life as a story like this, there is a main message: To be happy. Also, to *not* be perfect; to be a bit of everything instead. And *(pauses and picks up skipping rope)* don’t try to be something you’re not really. *(OLIVIA skips for a few moments, then picks up the poi and spins them a few times. Eventually turns to look at audience)* I don’t know if there’s anything else. I’m done, I think, and I’m feeling on top of the world right now. *(OLIVIA walks off stage singing to herself)*.

## Reflections: Act IV

Policy-makers and family violence service-providers in New Zealand are increasingly seeking new knowledge and insight from research with children to inform their work and, ideally, lead to improved children's services; better preventative and educational work with children; and public policies that reflect children's expressed needs. Olivia's monologue has the potential to contribute to this kind of knowledge; she 'blossoms' in an environment that poses considerable threats to her well-being.

The central theme binding together the stories Olivia told about her life in our final interview and throughout the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* was resilience. Resilience is a multi-dimensional concept however, defined in numerous ways. It generally refers to "an individuals' ability to bounce back from adverse experiences" (Garbarino, 2005, p. xi). Olivia's resilience includes, amongst other factors, making conscious decisions to think optimistically; creating structure and routine in her social life; connecting to her culture, ethnicity and extended *whanau* (family); and reflecting on her current circumstances and hopes, wishes, dreams and fears for the future.

### **"Moving on" and "being strong:" Optimism and discursive resources**

Optimism "exemplifies a lifeview where one looks upon the world as a positive place. Optimists generally believe that people and events are inherently good. Personal optimism correlates strongly with self-esteem, psychological well-being and personal health" (Segerstrom et al., 1998). The foundations of optimism have been long debated, especially in psychology, and are still contested today. There may be a genetic role with respect to "dispositional optimism"—the generalised expectancy that good things, rather than bad things, will occur—but optimism can also be learned (MacArthur & MacArthur, 1998; Seligman, 1998). Whatever the case, Olivia's optimism supports a general liveliness and enthusiasm for life and one way she sustains her optimistic outlook is through discourse—the particular words, metaphors, and stories she chooses to explain her life.

Jerome Bruner suggests that "a child can be helped to take a story and retell it in a way that allows [him or her] to present difficulties and to do so in a way that makes change conceivable and attainable...[thus], the story plays a significant role in

personal development” (Bruner, 1996, p. 113). Lakoff and Johnson argue, similarly, that “metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action. Such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor. This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. In this sense metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 156). The point here is that storytelling, particularly the telling of one’s life story, can play an important role in the construction of possible selves—“individuals’ ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming” (Markus and Nurius, 1986, p. 954). As Markus and Nurius (1986) write, “some possible selves stand as symbols of hope, whereas others are reminders of bleak, sad, or tragic futures that are to be avoided. Yet all of these ideas about what is possible for us to be, to think, to feel, or to experience provide a direction and impetus for action, change, and development” (p. 960).

Olivia demonstrates considerable ability in framing her life story as one of personal strength and resilience; that is, she uses discourse skillfully to create more positive “versions of events” in her life (Burr, 1995, p. 48). For example, throughout the *Dragonflies Programme*, Olivia frequently discussed difficult feelings and events, including her sexual abuse and the regular fighting between her mother and father and other family members. In the final interview, however, these incidents seemed peripheral to her overall story which centred instead on themes such as “moving on” and “being strong.” Olivia actively selected scenes and events that supported these more positive themes, enabling her to think more optimistically about her current circumstances and her future.

A number of other examples from Olivia’s narrative in Act IV of *A Record of Fieldwork* exemplify the way she uses her discursive skills to maintain a positive outlook on life. First of all, Olivia’s coping strategy when witnessing a fight at home is to force herself to think of ‘the positive’ in her life: “When you watch a fight it feels awful. I feel hurt. And sad. And mad...I try to deal with it by thinking of happy thoughts and doing happy things. Just trying to be positive. Definitely.” Correspondingly, Olivia’s advice to other children living with family violence is: “Be strong. Be positive. Just don’t think the worst.” Secondly, Olivia has regular arguments with her friends at school which are hurtful and confusing. When she summarises the role her friends play in her life, however, she emphasises that, above

all, they are special to her: “My friends *are* nice. Some of them are not really *really* nice, nice, nice, you know? But they’re friends. . . special is the main word to call them, because they really *are* special.” Third, although Olivia is saddened and angry about the violence in her family, she tries to focus on the good fortune of being able to live with her Auntie Shannon as an outcome of growing up with fighting at home. She also feels lucky to be “a strong person;” thus, she is confident in her personal strength. Olivia explains: “The fighting I’ve seen, at least it is something that’s behind me now. I have been able to move on because I’m strong and I know not to worry too much. I don’t know really how I became such a strong person. I guess people like my auntie have helped me. It’s very lucky I have her. Yes, very lucky.” Finally, Olivia reflects on her life lessons at the end of Act IV, stating: “If I think of my whole life as a story. . . there is a main message: To be happy. Also to *not* be perfect; to be a bit of everything instead. And don’t try to be something you’re not.” In other words, Olivia makes an active choice not to worry too much about the events in her life that aren’t “perfect;” she aspires instead to be well-rounded, happy, and true to herself.

My intention is in no way to imply that Olivia takes a nonchalant or dismissive attitude towards family violence, or that she doesn’t struggle with it on a daily basis. However, her refusal to highlight the negative impact of the violence and abuse on her life in our final interview reflects the view she has adopted of her identity as “multi-dimensional, adaptive, and complex” (Kiesinger, 1995, p. 217). If optimism is indeed innate to some degree, Olivia may be well-equipped temperamentally to cope with family violence; however, her discursive abilities also grant her a significant sense of “power” to “define” her own world (Ungar, 2005a, p. xxvi).

### **Alternative futures and possible selves: Reflexivity and agency**

Jerome Bruner (1990) describes two processes that enable the “transformation of self” (p. 109-110 cited in McCallister, 2004, p. 458). First, humans are reflexive; that is, we have the “capacity to turn around on the past and alter the present in its light, or to alter the past in the light of the present” (Bruner, 1990, p. 109-110). Secondly, we are capable of considering alternatives; that is, we have the capacity “to conceive of other ways of being, of acting, of striving” (Bruner, 1990, p. 110).

McCallister (2004) writes, in the same line of thought, that: “This combination—reflexivity and agency—allows individuals to adapt to the demands of context. We can entertain questions such as: ‘How am I doing?’ and ‘What’s possible for me?’ ” (p. 458). Olivia possesses both abilities described by Bruner and McCallister—she is highly reflective and able to envision many alternative futures and possible selves.

As Olivia narrates the events in her life in Act IV, she reflects naturally. For instance, when describing a relatively mundane story about a family visit to the hot pools, she considers the impact of the occasion on her self-understanding: “Going there [hot pools] was kind of important to me because I guess who I am is a water rat.” In addition, throughout our final research conversation, Olivia “confesses” to many different thoughts and feelings, engaging in “narrator self-talk” (Fraser, 2004, p. 13-14). She comments occasionally: “This is getting too long, isn’t it?” or “Okay, okay, I better hurry up.” Olivia also comes to new understandings of herself through the process of telling her life story. When she explains why she loves Māori activities, especially writing, language, and dance, for example, she realises they are opportunities to demonstrate her talents and skills at school. In turn, she reflects: “I guess I get to feel good about myself.”

Olivia has many hopes, goals, wishes, and dreams for her future. Here she explains, during our interview: “I have a lot of choices for when I’m older. . . I’m going to be an air hostess, or a mail woman, or a shop keeper, or a hair dresser, or a singer. Mostly a singer, I think.” The fact that Olivia uses the words “I’m going to be” rather than “I want to be” is an indication to me of her self-confidence and sense of agency. The implication is that she *can* make choices and decisions and enact them on the world. Similarly, confidence is extremely important to Olivia. Reflecting on her future, she stresses: “I don’t want to be shy. I want to be confident.” Confidence seems to mean more to Olivia than its dictionary definition of “self-assurance” or “certainty.” Rather, confidence is *protective* for Olivia; it is the certainty that she is capable of protecting herself against potential harms, hurts, and losses.

Markus and Nurius (1986) suggest that possible selves “function as incentives for future behavior...[because they are] selves to be approached *and* avoided” (p. 954). It is notable then, that Olivia’s hopes and dreams for the future are matched with realistic fears and worries. These likely play a significant role in regulating her “aspiration[s], confidence, [and] optimism” (Bruner, 1996, p. 36). For example,

Olivia is slightly apprehensive about having a husband in her future, although she considers it necessary “to have children. I’ll just tell him to do the cooking, to help, watch the kids. I hope he’ll be nice, and shy, and pretty...I don’t want to have a husband who is abusive to me and who might beat up the children.” She also doesn’t “want to be an early mother—have my kids when I’m about fifteen” or “end up broke and living in a shack or...on the streets.”

### “An upside-down pineapple cake:” Intellectual capacities

Olivia possesses an excellent, critical understanding of the cyclical and persistent nature of family violence and abuse. Her mother and step-father have not made a commitment to change the violence in their relationship. As a result, Olivia’s own relationship with her mother is difficult. Her mum is not capable of fulfilling the roles or duties Olivia believes are fundamental to care-giving, especially helping her every day: “Mum, she just doesn’t help me in heaps of stuff like she *should* do. Not like with day-to-day things.” Forgiving her mother for being unreliable and untrustworthy is complex and hard for Olivia to reconcile because it requires accepting constant disappointments. Ultimately, Olivia believes her life “would plump like an upside-down pineapple cake” if she lived with her mother again. She does not deceive herself about this sad reality, although it is emotionally difficult to accept: “When you can’t trust your mum,” Olivia explains, “It’s just sad. Awful.”

Olivia is similarly realistic about her step-father and, in fact, possesses an understanding of his abusive behaviour often not shared by *women* living in abusive relationships, perhaps even her own mother. She states: “I want my mum to be able to be a good mum. She needs some encouragement for that and a nice boyfriend. My step-dad’s not that bad right now, but it’s just cuz they are living with my other auntie so he doesn’t show his true colours right now.” In the absence of her step-father’s recognition of his abusive behaviour—let alone any effort to change it—Olivia’s implication that his ‘true self’ is an abusive self is likely quite accurate.

The previous sections have discussed Olivia’s optimistic attitude and enthusiasm for life, self-confidence, and sense of agency. It is critical, in my opinion, that she maintains these qualities in spite of her excellent and realistic understanding of family violence—knowledge many people would consider inherently negative or even

depressing. Gillian Mann (2004) notes that adults frequently avoid talking to children about events in their lives that are hurtful or “unhappy” (such as family violence) for fear it will “intensify” their pain (p. 11). Similarly, adults are often skeptical that children are capable of understanding the intricacies and complexities of issues such as abuse and family violence. Matthews (1984) comments on the tendency of adults to avoid “matters we [adults]... find difficult or problematic... How could a child, a mere child, make a useful contribution to thinking about something that we, with our much greater maturity and experience, find difficult or elusive? Why should a child be interested in such matters anyway? Don’t children have enough to think about that is ‘on their own level?’ ” (p. 1-2). Finally, there are still many people in general who hold the belief that children are simply ‘innocent victims’ of abuse—too innocent, in effect, to know any differently about family violence (see Ennew, 1986; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Jenks, 1996). The corollary assumption here is that children growing up in violent homes believe abusive behaviour is ‘normal’ or representative of typical intimate relationships.

Olivia’s narrative demonstrates that she is acutely aware that her family is ‘different’; the violence, in her view, “feels awful” and is extremely “hard to talk about.” Olivia also states that it “doesn’t even feel *right* talking about it [the abuse].” I would contend that these feelings and opinions were shared by all my research participants, to greater or lesser degrees, of course. Regardless of the frequency, severity and impact of family violence on each of my participant’s lives, every one of them *felt* the fighting distinguished his or her family from the majority of ‘normal’ homes. In my experience, adults often confuse children’s *tolerance* of family violence with naivety, immaturity, innocence, or an inability to think critically about their lives. Olivia explains during our interview, “It’s not scarier [at Mum’s place]. It’s just more comfortable at Auntie’s. It’s more like eggshells at Mum’s.” She is not *frightened* of the violence per se, because she has been forced to learn to tolerate it. The fact is, however, that tolerance does not mean *acceptance* or *approval*, nor does it require denying what one sees, or naively believing “that the affairs of state [or family] are in good hands” (Miller, 1988, p. 163). Tolerating family violence is simply a practical necessity for children living with a relatively uncommon social practice.

Children have the capacity for critical analysis, “powerfully stated observations, sustained eloquence, [and]... moral reflection” when given the opportunities to learn

these skills and express themselves safely (Coles, 1984, p. ix). Indeed, Olivia has shown me that children can be supported to think critically, practically, and realistically about their family circumstances, even if this requires discussing emotionally difficult realities. These kinds of conversations have helped Olivia gain the practical skills to keep herself safe from abuse and seek help in emergency situations—options that her own mother, for example, might never realise.

### **On ‘witnessing’ and helping family relationships**

Olivia’s confidence, positive attitude, ability to be self-reflective, and discursive and intellectual abilities are all essential to her resilience and ability to cope with the violence and abuse she has experienced throughout her life. However, Ungar (2005a) reminds us that “resilience is simultaneously a quality of the individual and the individual’s environment” (p. xxiv). Thus, without the presence of compassionate or helping “witnesses”<sup>38</sup> in Olivia’s life—aunts, uncles, siblings, teachers and friends, in particular—her capabilities may be diminished over time. It seems fitting, then, to end these reflections on Olivia’s monologue by giving brief consideration to the importance of helping social relationships for children living with family violence.

Regardless of an individual’s self-confidence, or ability to voice his or her feelings and opinions, Dalrymple (2003) argues that “in particular circumstances, we may all need or want some form of advocacy support” (p. 1049). Similarly, even if we are able to conceive of positive futures and possible selves, the ‘significant others’ in our lives play important roles in sustaining these self-images. Stryker (1968) contends that “identities continually seek validation” (cited in Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 956) and Ungar (2005a) suggests a child’s resilience depends partly on access to a “collective discourse” that defines and confirms a child’s “pattern of coping,” or identity, as resilient (p. xxiv). Ultimately, we cannot become what or whom we believe we are capable of becoming independently of our social environments and interactions.

Olivia’s family plays an important role in supporting her positive sense of self. Despite the abuse, violence, disappointments, frustrations and pain caused by some

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<sup>38</sup>Kaethe Weingarten discusses the concept of “witnessing” in many of her publications over the past decade. She argues that there are many witnesses to any act of violence—those directly affected and those who are witnesses to stories of violence, such as friends, family, significant others, teachers, therapists, etc. The importance of compassionate or helping witnesses to children growing up with domestic violence is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, Pania’s story.

of her family members at times, Olivia recognises two particularly important helping family relationships—with her brothers and her Auntie Shannon. Throughout the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* and briefly in Act IV, Olivia emphasises her brothers' abilities to help her: "Steven plays with me a lot," she recounts, "And he helps me sometimes... My other brother... he helps me and he's just so fun to be around. I love my brothers. They help me with all sorts." Olivia's relationship with her Auntie Shannon is even more essential to her overall health and well-being: "My auntie, well, she is pretty much everything. Everything... She helps me with everything and anything. Like she guides me along my life—my present, my past, and my future. And she tells me what's right or wrong... She always says that she helps me along the way and she does. She always helps me with growing up. I know she'll be there for me." The metaphor Olivia uses to describe her auntie as her 'life guide' is important. Alice Miller (1988) suggests that children need "the respect... of adults who take them seriously, love them, and honestly help them to become oriented in the world" (p. 167). Olivia feels this sense of mentorship and support in her relationship with her Auntie Shannon. It is comforting for Olivia to know that she isn't alone in life; indeed, she trusts that her auntie will provide her with the advice she needs to get by in life.

Finally, families provide children with various resources and activities, cultural stimuli, social contacts and relationships, and effect their availability and quality (Tomanovic, 2004). Olivia's leisure time at her auntie's house is made up of a variety of activities: Social, educational (music, second language), sporting, and cultural. She takes pride in her ability to develop the new skills required for each of these activities. She also feels a strong sense of belonging and connection to her Māori cultural background through participation in many of these engagements (for example, Te Reo Māori, kapa haka, waiata, poi). "I always dream about the poi," Olivia reflects during our final conversation, "And performing... It's definitely something special... The poi is, like, so much me... Poi is like my heart." It is noteworthy that many of these social activities were not available to Olivia when she lived with her mother and step-father. Moving to her auntie's house, thus, provided Olivia with numerous forums to pursue her interests and perhaps, by extension, "exits from the magic circle of social reproduction" (Jones & Wallace, 1990, cited in Tomanovic, 2004, p. 357).

In the end, Olivia's particular constellation of capacities helps her succeed in life: Optimism, discursive skills, reflexivity, hopeful outlooks for the future, an informed and critical view of family violence, and the presence of compassionate, helping people in her life (strong social ties). As Ungar (2005a) laments fittingly, it is unfortunate we do not hear more often from children themselves because "a quieter, less articulated version of children's lives speaks [as Olivia's monologue does] of resilience" (p. xvi). Following a brief chapter conclusions section, Pania's story (Chapter 4) presents another "hopeful vision" (Ungar, 2005a, p. xvi). Pania, like Olivia, is also adaptive, resourceful, and resilient.

## Chapter conclusions

This chapter has covered a lot of terrain. First, it delineated the processes and methods involved in the different stages of my fieldwork, including the realities and restrictions of my research setting—a children's domestic violence programme coordinated through a community organisation. It has shown the responsibilities I took on with the Palmerston North Women's Refuge in addition to my research roles. (For example, establishing the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* involved many meetings, countless hours of planning, a significant amount of waiting (especially for funding approval), advertising, cost-sourcing, training to become a facilitator, and numerous revisions during and after each new group of children). As a result, my research was a slow, time-intensive, and occasionally emotionally demanding process. "Deep hanging out" with children in their everyday lives, to use Geertz's (1998) term, was also precluded by my research site and the need to follow strict ethical principles to negotiate access to children through various gatekeepers (parents, teachers, social workers, other caregivers). Rather, my interactions with participant children in this study were time-limited, restricted largely to the weekly 2.5-hour sessions of the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*. However, there were also many advantages to my research approach. The biggest for me was being able to contribute in very practical (and, therefore, ethically-satisfying) ways to the provision of domestic violence services for women and children in the Palmerston North region of New Zealand. Finally, this chapter has shown children to be active agents in their lives via reflection on a number of themes and directions that emerged from the accounts featured in

the four-act play, *A Record of Fieldwork*. Chapter 4 builds on many of these themes. Readers will note especially striking similarities between Olivia and Pania.



## Chapter 4

# Pania's story: A manifesto for hope

*My dad, he's nice and I love him. I don't see him very much. It would be good if I saw him more but Mum and him don't like each other. I don't know why. I ain't old enough to know.*

(6-year old boy)

*When you watch them fighting it just feels stupid. I feel angry. I just do...anything else. I didn't care when Mum left Dad. Not that much. I don't want that much from him now. I'd like to see him, but only sometimes. Not all the time.*

(11-year old boy)

## Introducing Pania's story

I was introduced to Pania, her mother, and her siblings in late 2004, during their short stay at the Palmerston North Women's Refuge Safehouse. As Pania describes in her narrative later in this chapter, she and her siblings were very quickly moved from the Safehouse to live with different family members, so our relationships were abruptly curtailed. Exactly one year later however, Chantelle and I received a referral for Pania from the Ministry of Justice to attend the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*. Thus, Pania and I were reunited at the initial programme interview. Over the next few months, I was able to spend a significant amount of individual time with Pania, even upon the completion of her *Dragonflies* group. As a result, hers is the most detailed 'life history' I collected over the course of my research in New Zealand. Pania also edited her story after I had written it, making minor corrections to the details.

Pania's story is important to this work on other levels as well. For example, although it does not *explain* children's resilience to domestic violence, it points to some 'protective' factors in children's lives shared by other research participants—perhaps most notably, Steven and Olivia. As such, it functions to a degree as a frame narrative, facilitating a more summary understanding of why some children survive, and even thrive, in adverse conditions while others suffer harmful consequences.

Listening to and writing Pania's life story has also been enormously beneficial to me on a personal level. Indeed, I believe Pania and I engaged in a reciprocal practice of hope.<sup>1</sup> I helped to 'create' hope with her by providing opportunities for her to share her life story and listening attentively, with "my full being," while she narrated (Kabat-Zinn, 2006, n.p.). In return, Pania's story generated hope for me by reminding me of my life privileges and re-inspiring me about the potential value of this thesis<sup>2</sup> on a number of occasions when the thesis-writing process felt entirely overwhelming.

Finally, Pania's narrative leads naturally into discussions of common themes and experiences, such as hope, wisdom, resilience, and love. By and large, these subjects have been avoided by academic researchers of all disciplines on account of their elusiveness: They are difficult to define, measure, quantify, and qualify, not to mention

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<sup>1</sup>This idea is explored further as the chapter unfolds.

<sup>2</sup>Particularly, sharing my participants' stories with other people.

attract research funding. However, in order to come close to the ideal of articulating lived, emotional experience and, in the process, an anthropology that is actually “accessible to the people we...[purport] to represent” (Scheper-Hughes, 1992, p. 4), it is essential that researchers engage in these discussions.

I have constructed Pania’s story as an extended monologue, similar to Olivia’s. Pania acts as an omniscient narrator who guides readers through a chronological account of her life. I have interspersed her narration with italicised sections which are fictional (speculative) vignettes, written in first-person voice to represent ‘real-time.’ These texts function as ‘flashbacks’ and interior monologues, and encourage a sense of immediacy, drawing readers into the story. The vignettes represent memories that Pania highlighted as particularly salient or formative in her life—happiest times with her father; the first fight she witnessed between her mum and dad; the traumatic death of her great-grandmother; the interactions between her siblings during fights; the feeling of injustice about being afraid in her own home. I have tried to look through Pania’s eyes to write the vignettes; however, they are based on numerous descriptive notes and conversations we had together.<sup>3</sup> I chose to use extended monologue for Pania’s story, rather than excerpts from transcripts, to address the absence of children’s voices in literature on domestic violence. As mentioned before, I see my thesis is a vehicle for demonstrating children’s agency.

I begin Pania’s story with a poem titled *Bearing witness*, which I have constructed from Pania’s description of an isolated incident of violence witnessed in her home one evening. As noted in Chapter 2, domestic violence is an elusive topic of study for anthropologists because it cannot be observed first-hand. *Bearing witness*, however, provides a glimpse of the terror that domestic violence effects for children. The poem is meant to be performed by four people simultaneously. The voice that threads the piece together reads horizontally across the three columns, while each of the three vertical columns form stand-alone poems in themselves. It is these overlapping voices that convey a sense of the *lived* emotional experience of family violence from the point of view of a witness. The format of the poem aims to breathe life into Pania’s words, as well as my experience of them, in order to convey some of the multiple and fragmentary sensations—voices, thoughts, feelings, fears, both real and imagined—that are part of the experience of family violence for a witness. Following the poem, Pania

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<sup>3</sup>Pania has also reviewed the vignettes for their accuracy.

narrates her story and, at her conclusion, I shift into a more analytical discussion of two striking themes in her account: Hope and wisdom. To disentangle these themes I engage with literature primarily from the disciplines of psychology and philosophy.

## Pania's story

### Bearing witness (A poem for four voices)<sup>4</sup>

Fear	I wake up	Gasping for air
Moments like this	I think " <i>Is there no end</i> "	But Mum needs me, and
I have to go in there	How can I help her	I need to show her I love her
Voices	There are so many voices this time	It's really late
My feet move quietly	Down the hall	The lounge is dark
Uncle and his girlfriend are here	Mum is yelling at Dad	" <i>Stop fighting</i> "
I hurry towards Mum	Uncle grabs me	A tight grip on my arm
Yelling	" <i>Get out of here</i> "	" <i>Stay out of this</i> "
Frozen with fear	My legs feel weak	I slide down the wall behind Mum
Thump	Thump	Footsteps pound in my head
Dad comes back from the kitchen	There is a knife	A dancing knife in Dad's hand
Tick-tock	And in just a second really	Uncle grabs for Mum
Blurry...it's all blurry	I can't breathe	Something is crushing my chest
A knife is dancing in Mum's face now	My body is shaking	Somehow—I don't know how—Uncle leaves
I think my brother is there too	I see small bare feet and sleepy eyes	Now Dad is punching Mum
Dad is telling Mum " <i>You are so useless</i> "	You are so useless...	Useless.

My name is Pania Henare and my birthday is in twenty days. I'll be 13 then. There are heaps of pieces to the story of my life, but the one thing that ties them all together is love. Even though there is a lot of violence in my story, it is all because of love really. I think you will see what I mean.

My story begins with a lovely lady named Georgia, my mum. She was 18 and pregnant with a baby—that's me, of course. Her boyfriend, Thomas, was the father of the baby. He was 23, so much older. I mean, *very much* older. The story Mum told me about my birth is that one night in November it suddenly felt like she had wet her pants. For a few minutes she really didn't know what had happened and she just thought to herself "that's odd." Then she grasped what had actually happened—her waters had broken, and I was on my way! Mum told Dad and he didn't know what to do either, but at least he got the car. The only thing is, he pulled out of the drive and drove off for the hospital, leaving Mum behind in the bathroom. That's what Mum told me anyway. I guess soon enough Dad realised he had forgotten Mum so he went back for her and they went to the hospital together. About five or six hours later, they had me, Pania. Of course, I was the most beautiful and wonderful daughter in the world, and I was their first baby.

<sup>4</sup>The form of this poem is based on Kristina Lyons' winning entry, *Then Silence*, in the Society of Humanist Anthropology's Ethnographic Poetry Contest in 2005.

My mum said that when she first looked at me, a tiny little thing, she saw her granddad, even though he was dead. She said she held me in her arms and my great-granddad looked up at her and smiled. My mum really loved her granddad because he practically raised her and all of her brothers and sisters, so I think that is something special. That's why sometimes I say that when Mum had me, it was a re-birth. I like to call it re-birth too because Mum was going through birth again, 'though this time she was giving birth instead of being born! Anyway, Mum was so nervous about having a baby that she stayed in the hospital a whole week, even though the nurses and doctors told her she could go home the next day. She really didn't want to leave. She was very afraid to go home.

Probably the first memory I have is my brother Ethan's birth. It was in the summer and everyone was having a party at my mum and dad's house. Suddenly my mum had contractions so someone rang a taxi. When the driver realised Mum was pregnant he took her to the hospital straight away and didn't even let her pay. It's hard to remember some things from my childhood, but I think I waited a really long time in the hospital to see Mum and the baby. I remember doing cartwheels there and somehow hurting my head. I just remember going "Ouch!" Anyway, it was a big change when my brother came. My mum had actually been pregnant before him too, but she lost that baby. She's had a lot of miscarriages.

After Ethan, it was just baby after baby really. That's what it seemed like to me anyway; suddenly I had heaps of brothers and sisters! My first sister, Ashley, came only about 13 months after Ethan. She was three months early so she had to stay in an incubator for a while. I remember Mum was so depressed and all, but she still got pregnant again. Actually, only 11 months after Ashley, Daniel was born. So in even less than a year Mum had another baby! Oh, and Daniel arrived in the world on the exact same day as Mum's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. That's pretty cool, I think.

I guess during all this time, when my brothers and sisters were getting born, I was just growing up really. I start to remember heaps more of my life after I was about five or six years old. I have a lot of memories from those years.

*I pull my blanket close and make myself as small as possible but the sun has spoiled my sleep. I don't want to go to school today. Brrr. I jump up quickly—it's so cold! My feet tap softly on the wood floors as I run down the hall to Mum and Dad's room. Dad's still in bed. I leap—thump! "Good morning Daddy," I say, and snuggle up close to him. He is nice and warm, and he puts his arms around me and holds me close. "Please don't make me go to school today Daddy," I say, "Mummy will make*

*me go, but I don't want to. Please let me stay home with you." Daddy is laughing when Mum walks in the room. She laughs too. What is so funny? I wonder. "What's that little bundle under there Tom?" Mum says. I am hiding deep in the bed. Daddy says "Well, Georgie, I've got a little girl in here. She's looking pretty sick. I think she might need the day off school." I smile. I knew Daddy would be on my side.*

One of the best times ever with my family was a birthday party in our old house in Dunedin. It was quite a big house really—big enough that we had our own playroom in it. It was the kind of room with, like, lots of toys and game pieces and dolls with no heads and chippie packages on the floor. Anyway, I can't even remember whose birthday it was, but it was one of ours, and Dad got us a bouncy castle and put it inside our house in the playroom. That was just the most awesome thing ever. I remember jumping on it and feeling so happy. Our relatives were there too for the party and we were having nice food. Everything tasted so good. It was one of the times when I remember feeling like nothing could possibly spoil the moment. It was like everything was good and perfect in my life...just seeing all the happy faces, feeling totally good to be with everybody. Yep, that day with the bouncy castle really had an impact on me, on who I am today. It just proved to me how much my parents cared about me. Even though they're not perfect, you know, it showed that they were loving.

I have some bad memories too from back then at our old house in Dunedin.

*It's so loud. Please, someone? Make that horrible noise go away. What's happening? Ethan is screaming. His nose is running down his face. It drips onto the tray of his high chair. I don't feel so good. Something is wrong with my tummy. I don't want to eat any more. I get down carefully from the table to go see what is happening. Why is Daddy hurting Mummy? "Mummy. Muuummmmy," I say. I don't know what is happening. Mum is crying, and she's bleeding now. Why is Daddy punching her? Why? "Muuummmmy." Daddy, help us. Help me. Daddy?*

When I think about it now, it's kind of like you can sit down for tea and, in that moment, your whole life changes forever. I don't remember all the details because I was only about five, but I know I saw my dad punch my mum and I remember thinking *why?* Why is he doing this? I remember that so clearly. I think they probably just had an argument, and then he punched her. That was the first time.

About this time too, when I was five, my great-grandmother passed away. That was a huge thing in my life, in all our lives. It really changed everything. Have you ever

seen a dead person before?

*Cold, blank, and empty  
Where I am now, once was she  
Alive, sparkling. . . oomph!*

I saw her face—my great grandmother’s cold, dead face. The memory is still so clear. It looked like the life had been sucked out of her, just like everyone always says about dead people. It was so depressing. Everyone was depressed. Everyone had known my great-grandmother and they all loved and respected her. We came to Palmerston North for the funeral and had a big celebration to honour her life. About a week after that, my mum and dad left us in Palmy to live with our auntie. So we went with Auntie to the *marae*<sup>5</sup> and Mum and Dad went back to Dunedin. We didn’t see them again for about a year maybe. I think they stayed in touch with my family over the year, but they never spoke to me or my brothers and sister.

Even though Mum and Dad had left us, when we started living in Palmy, I began to know who my family actually was. I realised how much family and support I had. It just showed me I had a lot of love from more people than just my mum and dad.

About a year afterwards, my auntie realised she just couldn’t look after us anymore. It’s not that she couldn’t handle it, but she had three of her own children, so it was just too hard. So my nan got a job so she could take us in. We moved in with Nan and started school again. Nan had never looked after her own children. She’d had Mum and them, but she gave them to her mum. I think the only way she could deal with children was by bribing them. It was good though; she spoiled us a lot.

I didn’t know Mum and Dad would be coming back, but suddenly there they were, and it turned out that Mum had had another baby a few months earlier. That was my sister Emma. I think I was around 8 years old then. So, anyway, Mum and Dad came back and we stayed in Palmerston North with them and, pretty much, everyone just went on with their lives.

I guess the next big thing that happened was when I was 9. I remember going to a friend’s birthday party dressed up as Barbie without the whole “blonde hair thing.” I was so excited because I loved birthday parties, but there were so many arguments at

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<sup>5</sup>In Māori society, the marae is a ‘sacred place’—an open space, courtyard, or complex of buildings surrounding the courtyard—where people gather. It is a “forum of social life” (<http://www.teara.govt.nz/ENZ-Utility/SiteInformation/Glossary/en#marae>).

this party that I'd call it "birthday blues" if I had to give it a name. Anyway, that's not the important part. When the party was over, my friend's mum took me home and she said, "Wouldn't it be cool if your mum had her next baby tonight, on the day of my daughter's birthday?" The weird coincidence is that my mum did have my newest sister that night. When I woke up, I found out we had a new baby—another girl! It was a bit of a bummer for me though because I really wanted to watch Mum give birth to my sister.

After that, there was just one more baby—Samantha—the last one of us. A little while before Sam was born, Mum had gone to the hospital because she fainted. She was always collapsing. The doctor told her that she'd had a miscarriage. When Mum told me this I was so sad. I said, "Oh Mum, oh no! That's so sad." I made her a card saying how horrible it was too actually. About a week later though, she came home and said to me, "Pania, I'm pregnant." I was thinking, "How is this possible?" so I said to Mum, "How can you be pregnant? You just had a miscarriage!" She told me, "It turns out I was going to have twins, but one of them died. I'm still pregnant with the other." I was just thinking to myself, "Nooooo!" because that's pretty sad—having a twin that dies.

When Sam was actually about to be born, Nan came and picked me up from school and told me Mum was in the hospital. We waited at the hospital for about, I think, 10 hours. It was just me and Nan and Auntie there. Actually, it was a pretty funny time. . . you know how when you are giving birth they give you gas to make the pain go away but not to put you to sleep? Well, my auntie loves that stuff, that gas. She kept saying to me, "C'mon Pania, have some, have some." I tried some and then I was on the bed thinking, "Whoooooo." I almost fell asleep and missed the birth again, but luckily I didn't! So I got to watch Mum give birth to Samantha. I remember when the midwife gave me Sam too. I didn't want to hold her cuz I was scared I was going to drop her, but also because she was all blue. I thought she couldn't breathe and she just looked scary. But I held her anyway and the blue started going off her slowly. Soon she wasn't blue anymore and she was just so adorable. She opened up her eyes and looked at me and I said, "Hello." She's just turned three now, Samantha. I've seen a lot of newborn babies, haven't I? Probably some of my happiest times were seeing all my brothers and sisters when they were born; seeing them for the first time.

Anyway, now that all my brothers and sisters were born, what happened next is that Mum and Dad made a compromise. They weren't really living together at this point. The thing is that my dad always hated my nan and my auntie. He didn't like how involved they were in our lives. He said they were useless. My nan and auntie said my dad made up too many excuses for his mistakes. Anyway, Dad didn't want Mum and all of us kids staying with Nan anymore, so he stupidly got us another house. I

say “stupidly” because the house was only on the next street over from Nan’s place. And it was also only a few houses away from my auntie’s place. The deal that my mum and dad made was that Mum and us wouldn’t live with Nan anymore and, in exchange, Dad would stop bothering Mum. So we moved to our new house with Dad again, but nothing much changed. Dad still bothered Mum. It was his problem really.

I remember heaps about that time. Sometimes we got home from school and no one was there. Mum and Dad would just be out or something. Or they were arguing. We’d climb through the window then. I used to get up really early for school too. I was a school fanatic. I mean, honestly, I couldn’t stop going to school. It was the one place where I felt I could keep myself busy. When I was at home the only thing I could keep busy with was cleaning up and, you know, I didn’t really like cleaning up. So, yeah, I’d wake up around 7:30 am. That’s a reasonable time actually, isn’t it? I’d have a shower and then I’d wake my brothers and sisters up by pouring cold water on them, or jumping on them, or something funny like that. They’d get all angry, but it made them wake up. I would get myself ready, then I’d grab out some lunch for my brothers and sisters, but sometimes I’d forget. Actually, one time, my brother took ‘off’ crumpets to school for lunch. You know those golden crumpets? He brought ones that we’d had for at least a month. And they were cold too, but he ate them. Anyway, my brothers and sisters would get changed so slowly. I’d have to yell out to them to hurry up always. The bus knew we were gonna be late every day so it would stay out there for ten minutes. When we got to school, we’d say goodbye to each other and stuff and then, when we came back home, we’d just eat and eat. If we forgot our lunches, I mean.

*“Guess what we did at school today, Pania?” Ashley won’t stop talking! Can’t she be quiet for once. She just goes on and on... “What?” I mutter, trying to sound bored. She doesn’t notice. “We worked on our World Water Day projects and...and...well...my teacher wants us to be an Enviro-School.” “Mmm,” I mumble and turn to listen to Daniel talking to Ethan instead. “Is The Simpsons gonna be on when we get home? I think they are s’pposed be on at 4 o’clock now. Cuz that’s what I heard on the last Simpsons. Ethan? Ethan! What about The Simpsons?” “Stop pulling on my shirt, Dan. I heard you,” Ethan says, “It’s only 3:00 pm right now, so you’re going to have to wait an hour to find out, okay? Oh, hey, I’m gonna jump the fence. Watch this...” “Ethan, STOP IT!” Ashley yells out, like she is his mother instead of his little sister. “Why don’t you just go through the gate already?” she says as she runs up the stairs and opens the door to our house. I hear her yell, “Muuuuuuuuuum. Muuum. We’re home, Mum.”*

*Silence. There is silence for a moment, and then Mum's screaming.*

*Ashley starts to cry immediately. How can she just cry like that? So instantly? Daniel grabs my hand. He's only a little boy still, just in kindy.<sup>6</sup> "Dad!" Ethan says, and I look over to see Dad standing in the hall staring at us. His face is completely red and the big vein on his neck is pumping like it always does when he is real angry. I feel the hairs on my neck stand up and my throat gets all tight. Oh, why do I even get nervous after all the fights I've seen? "Go to your rooms," Dad says, the words just coming straight out through his teeth somehow. Asshole, I think, and hold Daniel's hand tighter as we walk towards his room. We're all pretty quiet in the room for a couple minutes. Then, finally, I feel like I can talk again: "Don't cry anymore, Ash. It's going to be okay. You know it's always okay. Don't worry. Ethan's getting the pens out—the new gel writers that Auntie bought us last week. We can work on the drawings we started yesterday." I try to make my voice sound calm. Dan looks at me with a huge pout on his mouth and say in a real whinging voice, "I'm starving, Pania." "Me too," Ashley chimes in, "And where are the babies?" "They are probably in their rooms, just having a nap. I'll go get us something to eat," I say, "I'll be real quick." My heart is beating fast when I get to the kitchen. It isn't fair I have to sneak around in my own house! I don't have time to look after the little kids today either. I have to do my book report. Don't they ever think that I might be, like, busy? What can I get us to eat? Oh, there's some bread. I'll just grab that.*

So, yep, I grabbed the whole loaf of bread and was going to walk back to the boy's room but then Mum let out this really *really* terrible scream. I ran to the lounge and saw Dad pulling Mum by her hair. He was dragging her across the floor and her lip was bleeding and she just looked really bad. She wasn't even saying anything, but her eyes looked really scared.

I felt kind of dizzy and sick and my throat got really tight then. Dad saw me there though and he said something like, "Get back into your room right now Pania." I think I just stood there for a moment not knowing what to do. Then Mum said, "I'm okay, Pania. Just go to your room." So I ran back to the room. I barely got inside the door and Ethan said, "Didn't you even bring any Marmite or anything?"

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<sup>6</sup>Kindergarten.

Probably the lowest point in my whole life was whenever I saw my dad hitting my mum. I just used to think they weren't supposed to be doing that because they loved each other. People who love each other don't hurt each other—that kind of thing. Another really low point was when my dad beat *me* up. That really changed the way I thought about myself as a person cuz, like, I'd always gotten away with things before because I was a "Daddy's girl." When he hurt me though, it just made me realise that I wasn't always going to get away with things just because I thought...like... Well, I always thought that I would get away with things from Dad. It just made me realise that nothing is *always* going to go my way. No matter how much you wish, or pray even, for something to happen it's not always going to go the way you expected.

For parts of my life, my Dad always seemed to hurt other people. I knew when he was going to hurt Mum. It was mainly just arguments about little things that would start it, like "Oh we don't have enough money for this" and "Well, if you got a job maybe we would" or "Who else is going to look after the kids?" My mum's a woman who believes in what she says. I mean, if she says something, it's what she really means or believes. And my dad just always thinks that he's right no matter what. So my dad would say one thing and my mum would say another and even though my dad knew that my mum was right, and she knew too, he'd always beat her up as an excuse to say that he was still better than her. Just to say that she was useless.

I think violent fathers need to know that when they hurt others they are hurting themselves too. If I could say anything to other abusive men it would be something like, "If you hurt other people, they're just going to hate you, and you're going to hate yourself for that."

All of this stuff—the fighting, my dad's violence—has impacted me, my personality. People see me as a cheerful and bubbly person all the time cuz I'm never angry at anyone. I think the reason that I'm so happy and bubbly and nice to everyone is that I know if I'm upset or angry then people won't like me. My mum was always thinking negative and it made it hard for people to be close to her. I've decided to think positive instead. I learnt from my mum's mistake of always thinking, "What bad thing is going to happen next?" I am always thinking of the good things instead. I wouldn't change my life either. You know how people say that what's happened in your life makes you who you are? That's why I wouldn't change my life; because I'm happy with the person I am. My life has made me *me* and if I'd grown up any other way I wouldn't be me. And I don't want to be someone else. I don't want to pretend to be something I'm not either. I think all the hard things in my life just make me more grateful for the good things that happen. When something really good happens, you think, "Oh, that's good," and that's about it, right?" But, if you've gone

through heaps of trauma, you know the good things are not always going to happen. You can't take them for granted.

Probably the biggest challenge I've faced in my life is overcoming the fear that—or, I guess, the *fact* that—my family isn't perfect. For a long time, I was always trying to make myself think about the good things in my family only, but then I realised it was okay if things weren't *always* good. That's just the way it is—bad, sometimes. I had to, like, understand this and try to overcome my fears about the bad times so they wouldn't take me over as a person. And just so I could try to be supportive for my brothers and sisters. I think around the time I moved to Palmerston North, when I was about eight, I just sort of said to myself “My family may not be perfect but at least I have a family that loves and cares for me.” You know?

My brothers and sisters are the ones who have helped me the most with having a family that isn't perfect. I really don't think I could have dealt with anything without them. You know how people sometimes say, “I hate my brothers and sisters?” I used to say that too when I was mad at them, like, “I hate ‘yous.’ I wish ‘yous’ had never been born.” But I don't think I would have been able to cope without them because they've always been there. Even though they're, you know, annoying sometimes, when something bad had just happened at home they'd say something like, “Um, Pania, I'm hungry. Can you make me some toast?” Something distracting like that. I'd be thinking, “*Don't you see* that something's just happened?” But, still, I'd say, “Yeah, I will, later” and it would just kind of put me off the whole thing. They'd always try and distract me actually. They were always saying, “It's alright Pania. It's going to be okay,” even though I should have been saying that to them really. I've probably actually become closer to my brothers and sisters than if... well...when you don't live with family violence, you grow up with your siblings but I think you do your own thing. You just aren't as close. Probably anyway. It has really affected me, growing up in this family. Just knowing that no one is perfect. Everyone has flaws.

Well, the next part of my life story is about separation. That sounds kind of bad, I know, but there are some good parts too.

It started a couple years ago now. I went home one day and my mum had gone to the *kōhanga*<sup>7</sup> for a meeting with my brothers and sisters. I was used to being home alone though, so I was just watching TV. Then my dad came home and asked me where Mum was. I said, “She's at the *kōhanga*” and he said, “She's so useless” and some other stuff. When Mum came back she said, “Grab your stuff kids, we are

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<sup>7</sup>*Kōhanga reo* are kindergartens in New Zealand where all instruction is in the Māori language.

staying at Auntie's for a while." So we went and grabbed our stuff. Then Mum said to Dad, like most people would if they needed some time alone, "I think we need some time apart." My dad, of course, did not agree. So they were arguing and it was *really* bad. Really, *really* bad. I ran to my auntie's house, since she was only a few houses away, and I told her. She and Nan called the cops. By the time the cops got there, my dad had taken my brothers hostage. I mean, not really hostage, like in the movies, but he was saying he wouldn't let them go with us. The cops said they needed to ring CYFS<sup>8</sup> about it. We'd been involved with CYFS for a few years, but we'd never had a problem like this before. Anyway, the next day, CYFS said that we weren't allowed to stay in Palmerston North anymore.

We moved to the Women's Refuge Safehouse to figure out where to go next. That was a really bad time for my mum. She was having arguments with all my family. They weren't agreeing on anything. For me, well, I actually made a lot of friends when I was at the Safehouse, like you, Jen. We met then, so it wasn't all terrible.

After the Safehouse, though, is the really sad part of my life—I call it "Loss of Loved Ones." Mum moved away from us. She had to go. She was a mess. First she took us to Wellington though to stay with our auntie and uncle there for a few days. Auntie and Uncle called this really big meeting with all our family and everyone from everywhere came there—they came down, or up, or whatever—and discussed who would have who, who should go to live with who. We were all split up—my brothers and sisters. We went different places with different family. Some of us stayed together though, like Ashley stayed with me in Wellington, but Ethan had to go all alone to Hastings. They were all crying and crying and saying they wanted to come with me. It was just a really big loss. You know how you spend so much time with someone and then, when you're apart, you feel like you've lost a part of yourself? We'd been together forever, and then. . .

But it was great for me in Wellington really. We used to get out takeaways, and go shopping, and go to the pools. And even when we got told off, we were still spoiled. Like, once, we were playing a game and Ashley wouldn't stop screaming. My cousins and I were trying to get her to shut up, but my uncle heard and he told us all off, and separated us. About an hour later, Auntie and Uncle said, "We were going to take you guys to the pools, but you were naughty so we won't now." But then, only about half an hour later, they took us anyway. It was awesome! Basically, my auntie and uncle in Wellington were strict but quite soft too. They had rules and stuff, but

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<sup>8</sup>CYFS refers to the New Zealand Department of Child Youth and Family Services, a division of the Ministry of Social Development whose mandate is the provision of social services to ensure the protection of children and youth in the country.

they felt like you should still always have fun. One of the best things about living in Wellington was Christmas day. We went to Auntie's friend's house and they had a HUGE Christmas tree with about 200 presents under it. There were so many for us too—probably 60 or something. Really. I got a My Photo Booth, a password journal, a Jam & Shread Pen, and all that stuff. I even got lotion and deodorant. It was great. I had two or three Christmas dinners that day too. I'm really glad I was there for the holidays. My auntie and nan in Palmy, who had Jacob and Samantha still, had asked earlier if I wanted to go back home with them for Christmas and then stay there again. They said, "It's up to you Pania." I said, "Yes, I'll go home, but after the holidays."

When I did have to say goodbye after Christmas, it was actually quite upsetting. My auntie came from Palmy and picked me up but I didn't want to leave then. I mean, I *did* want to leave, but... I don't know. I just fell asleep the whole drive back. They woke me up once and asked me if I wanted some food. I was really hungry but I couldn't eat anything then. I just said, "No thank you." When I got there I saw Samantha and Jacob and then I thought "Home Sweet Home."

Palmerston really is my home. It's in my *mihī*.<sup>9</sup> I say "*no kawakawa*" which means Otaki and then I go "*raua ko Palmerston North ahau*." So, I'm saying, "I live in Otaki but Palmerston North will always be my home."

On the day I got back to Palmy, I didn't go straight to school. I missed that day of school. I got Samantha ready for choir and stuff though and I said hello to everyone. About a couple of days later, I went to school and everyone said things like, "Oh my gosh, Pania, where have you been? You missed school last year for, like, two whole months and we didn't know where you were?" I was saying, "Oh, I know!" There was a lot of catching up to do.

So I was living with Auntie again and going to my old school when Mum said she wanted to see me. I hadn't seen her in months. About three months maybe. She was staying in Palmerston somewhere. So I met her at the lawyer's office and she took me away so we could spend a few days together, just going out and stuff.

My mum has influenced me a lot because she went through so much but still always gritted her teeth and just did it. That's like my nan too. She went through a lot of

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<sup>9</sup>A *mihī* is a speech given during the traditional Māori welcome ceremony called the *powhiri*. "The purpose of the *mihī* is firstly to weave together the past, present, and future by acknowledging the creator, guardians, the dead and the living (those present at the *powhiri*), and secondly to lay down the *kaupapa* (the reason) for the event that is to take place. Each speech is followed by a *waiata* (song)" (<http://www.macdiarmid.ac.nz/amn3/Otherinfo/Powhiri.html>).

things, a lot of hard stuff in her life, but she's pulled through. My mum and my nan have both just kind of given me an influence to believe in myself. To never give up.

Anyway, Mum dropped me back home on a Sunday. The next day was just terrible really. I remember it well. Auntie and Nan picked me up at school. The little kids, Jacob and Sam, were already in the van. We were going to the pools, and we had a fun swim—my cousins were there too. After, we had a bit of *kai*<sup>10</sup>—some fish 'n chips. I was really tired in the van on the way back home, so I fell asleep. . .

*“Pania, wake up. Wake up, Pania.” I feel Nan’s arm on my shoulder. She’s shaking me, but I don’t feel like waking up yet. “It’s CYFS, Pania. CYFS is here,” Nan says. My eyes are instantly wide open. “What? What do you mean?” My stomach is sick. This is really bad. Outside the van, I see Auntie yelling at a man and woman. I guess they are the CYFS people. “You are not taking them away from me. I’m not letting them go with you,” I hear her yell through the windows. My legs start to shake. Sam cries so I unbuckle the belt from her car seat and pick her up and just hold her really close. She’s heavy now. I hug her really tight. Jacob wants to get out of the van, so I climb out first and then help him jump down. The CYFS woman is looking at me. Why is she smiling? Jacob runs to Auntie with his arms stretched out. He wants her to pick him up. Oh why is this happening now? I’m not prepared for this. I don’t know if I can deal with it right now.*

So we got taken away again. I guess it was because of all the things that had happened to my family over the year. It was really depressing and sad though. I didn't want to cry in front of everyone. I don't cry in front of anyone ever, actually. My auntie and uncle here in Otaki have never seen me cry. My cousin even said to me the other day, “Pania, I've never seen you cry.” I was a little surprised about that and I asked her, “Oh, is that a good thing?” She said, “Oh, yeah, I guess, but it's just that I don't know what you look like when you cry.” I laughed a little and said, “Oh, okay.” It's not that I don't cry; I just don't cry in front of people. I think it's a bit. . . oh, I just feel uncomfortable when I cry in front of people. So I just cry when I'm alone. Cry in the pillow and stuff.

Anyway, when we got taken away this time, it was much worse because we weren't going with family. Tears were welling up in my eyes, but I didn't shed one. I just put my fingers to the corners of my eyes and cried that way. I said goodbye and stuff. My auntie and nan refused to give CYFS any nappies or other stuff for the

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<sup>10</sup>“Food” in New Zealand English, originally from the Māori language.

babies. They only gave them clothes and bottles. We went to this lady's house called Tamsin. She fostered a lot of other children. There was a boy called Matthew there, who was 13, and he was actually kind of cute. I mean, you can't *not* notice things like that. Tamsin fostered Becs too. She was 11, the same age as me then. And Becs' brother, Karl, was there and he was seven. And Tamsin actually had lots of her own children. One of her oldest sons and his wife had eight children and they all spent most of their time at the house. Tamsin's younger son was living there as well and he had a girlfriend so, like, the house was so full! But, still, they seemed to have room for all of us. They were really nice to me and Sam and Jacob too. I felt lonely though because I didn't have any brothers or sisters to talk to. Sam and Jacob were just babies really and I thought I couldn't, like, talk to anyone else there.

My brothers and sisters and me, we are kind of like the kids in that movie, *Once Were Warriors*.<sup>11</sup> Have you seen that? The lady in the movie got beaten up and my mum used to have bruises and black eyes like that from my dad. And my dad sexually harassed my mum sometimes too. Basically, my mum went through the same stuff as the woman in the movie. Me and my brother Ethan used to like to watch that movie together. I think Ethan was more interested in the hitting stuff than I was. I liked the story just because of the outcome, about how a woman has so much strength but she just doesn't have the strength to leave her husband. When she finally does it shows what kind of person the violence has made her and her family. It's really quite sad too though because her daughter commits suicide. Anyway, like the kids in the movie, when we are together, my brothers and sisters and I are always there for each other—to hold each other, and look after each other, and stuff.

At Tamsin's house, I just tried to help out. I woke up really late, about 10 am maybe, or sometimes earlier. I didn't go to school then. I woke up, had a shower, got dressed, got the babies dressed, made breakfast, cleaned up our bedroom, and then if Tamsin wanted me to clean the kitchen or do the dishes or something, I'd do it. Or I would pull up the curtains, or vacuum, or something like that. Sometimes I even cleaned the dirty drawers and stuff. Tamsin kind of spoiled me. It was probably just that the other foster kids were kind of dumb or something. I mean, Becs wasn't "mental dumb" but she was such a day-dreamer. Tamsin would ask her to do something like bring her a tablecloth and she'd come back with a towel. Becs wouldn't listen basically. Tamsin would get really annoyed with her and smack her sometimes. And Matthew was a bit of a naughty kid. He'd always get told off by the teachers or he'd wag school. He wouldn't go to class or something. Just things like that. I stayed there for about a month and Tamsin said if CYFS wasn't going

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<sup>11</sup> *Once Were Warriors* is a well-known novel by Alan Duff (1990) and, later, film directed by Lee Tamahori (1994) about a family's experiences of domestic violence in New Zealand.

to take me somewhere else then I could start school on Monday. But they had a meeting then and Nan met us at the CYFS office and took us back to Palmy, but just to see everyone and say goodbye again. Actually, all of our relatives were there in Palmerston, but not my brothers and sisters. Even my auntie and uncle that I'm living with now in Otaki were there then, I think. They had offered to take me at this point, but nothing had happened yet.

So, next, I went to Rotorua to my other nanny's place, this time with Sam, Jacob, and Emma. That makes me realise, I've been all over New Zealand really! I just thought about that. I didn't really like it in Rotorua. It wasn't the best, but it was okay. It's not that Nanny and Pops weren't nice to us. They *were* nice, and they let me stay up a bit later and have chocolate biscuits and stuff. I loved my nanny's baking, actually. The thing I didn't like was that they were very strict. I mean, once I was playing dolls with my sisters and one of the dolls only had only one shoe, so I was saying something like, "Oh my gosh, where's my shoe? Where's my shoe? I'll go get it and put it on." Nanny was listening and she told me not to "say stupid things like that in front of the little girls." So, I mean, I would have gotten used to it there, I'm sure, but it was just boring. It was hard to keep myself busy without doing "something stupid."

At least I started school again in Rotorua though. I did *waka ama*<sup>12</sup> as well. For about a month my daily routine was like this: Wake up, do waka ama at 5:30 in the morning until about 7:30 or 8 am, then come back home, have a shower, get dressed and do the bed. Then I'd say goodbye to Jacob, Samantha, and Emma and walk up to my cousin Danielle's. Danielle and I walked to school together then.

After about three months in Rotorua, I got dropped off here, at this house in Otaki. That was pretty good except that I had to leave Jacob, Sam, and Emma in Rotorua. I was finishing a pie actually when I got here, cuz Auntie and Uncle had bought me a drink and a pie on the way down from Rotorua. I asked Summer, my cousin, if she wanted some and she said "No, thanks." Summer was really nice to me then actually. Not like now. Now we argue every day! They were all really nice. I was just being really quiet for a while after I got here and I didn't eat a lot either. It's not that I was anorexic or anything but, at tea time, they'd ask me if I wanted anything more and I'd say, "No thanks, I'm alright." I think I was just being shy.

I've been here for about a year and a month now. I saw my social worker and my lawyer a few weeks ago and they said they were putting in something for me to be legally in Auntie and Uncle's care so CYFS won't have to come and check up on

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<sup>12</sup>Outrigger canoe paddling.

me all the time. That's pretty good. I'm pretty happy here. I suppose it's kind of easier if CYFS doesn't come to check up all the time. The CYFS workers always go through the same thing every time—they say, in a deep voice, something like, “Not every child has gone through what you've been through for your age, Pania. You've gone through a lot of trauma in the past couple of years but, you know, if you need to talk to someone we're always here and if you have any problems, you should let us know.” I've actually had a lot of good people from CYFS. I just don't like this one Gary guy. Ugh. He just scares me. Once, there was a meeting about us and I went downstairs to look for my brothers and sisters. Gary stopped me though and said, “Where do you think you're going?” I told him, “To look for my brothers and sisters.” He said, “No, you have to stay up here.” I was thinking to myself then, I don't like you.

I suppose I *have* been through a lot of trauma. People just try to tell you that no matter what happens, just keep being you. I believe that. A few of my cousins, some that I've met too, have gone into gangs or killed themselves, or gone into prison and stuff. They've really influenced me not to be pressured into doing something I don't want to do and not to pretend to be someone just because other people think it's cool. Sometimes, too, my nan and auntie in Palmy have told me things that have really stuck like, “Pania, you've been through a lot in your life but it doesn't change who you are. Actually it's made you who you are—such a nice and caring and loving person.”

So I guess I'm on the last chapter of my life story now. It's called, “A New Beginning.” That sounds pretty cool, doesn't it? Ever since I've moved here to Otaki I've got school uniform, went to Intermediate, got into the best house at school, made friends, went on heaps of trips with school, and now I'm starting high school. There's been ups and downs though, like my mum and uncle having an argument and stuff. I haven't seen my mum for a long time either. She doesn't contact us. She just doesn't really stick with the rules for contact with us. It's been a while but, you know, I just think she needs to get her stuff—her shit, really—together. It's kind of like she's messing up her own life and taking us down with her. Every time something bad happens to her, it always seems to backfire on us because we love her. If something bad happens to her, we care about her, and worry.

If I could say anything to other mothers in abusive relationships right now it would probably be: “If you love your children, treat them with a better life.” They should know that their children are feeling their pain. Probably the saddest thing for me is being separated from my brothers and sisters. If I could somehow change things, I wouldn't necessarily make anyone in my family different, but I'd change what we've been through so my brothers and sisters could be closer. When you're away from

your brothers and sisters you realise how much you miss them. Sometimes it really gets me down. Sometimes I wish I wasn't born or I could just die or something, you know? But, I mean, that never lasts too long. I would never intentionally hurt myself or anything. I don't grieve about it all the time. I don't have time for that actually. Sometimes I just have to go to my room and listen to music and try to ignore it, that's all. Music really helps, I've found. Oh, and this might sound silly, but sometimes I dream of things like being a cat. Just a regular household cat since they get pampered a lot, and they are really clean, and they always land on their feet! Oh, and they have nine lives. Now that's pretty cool.

Mainly my parents argued over little things in our family, and money. It was obvious they just weren't suitable for each other; they were incompatible. They couldn't work anything out! It made me angry sometimes because they knew that things wouldn't work out with each other but they never left each other. I guess my mum just wanted us to be "a real family." They didn't want to put everything on us because of their actions but, I suppose, that's what happened.

When I think about my future I just really want to live my life to the full. Hopefully I can take an airplane sometime, maybe even "A" class on the airplane, with the lie-down beds and stuff and the little packaged food. I'd like to do some other things too, like bungee jump and skydive. Pretty much just have fun. The best scenario I can see happening to me is probably something like this: I keep going through high school, get a degree, visit my family and friends frequently—and hopefully we can live together sometime—get a good job and, you know, have fun. I'd like to find a guy who's perfect...well, not perfect, of course, but as perfect as we can be! Just a caring and loving guy, I mean. A nice father figure. And he'd have to be good-looking too, in some way.

I don't really like to think about a future for myself that is *too* negative, but I guess I do sometimes. I could fail all my tests at school and have to work cleaning a toilet or something. I would hate to have to clean for work. And I would hate it if heaps of close relatives died. I know everyone is going to die but I still just hate that. When they die, it's just a big shock, even though you know it's going to happen. Another bad thing that could happen is that my love life wouldn't go really well. Everything wouldn't be perfect. Oh, and something that actually *could* happen—that I don't like to think about at all cuz it would be really horrible—is not having good contact with my brothers and sisters, or having an argument with my brothers and sisters and family and relatives. Maybe not speaking to them even. That would be so horrible. Oh, I can't think of that actually. Everything could go downhill, in my worst possible future...I could go into prison, do drugs...but I'm not going to. I'm not going to smoke either. So, enough of that.

Like I said at the beginning, my life story has a main message. It's love. My dad was afraid of my mum leaving him because he loved her too much. And we were all afraid of being separated—me, my brothers and sisters, Mum and Dad—because we loved each other so much. Also, someone I loved was always hurting someone else that I loved. There's a lot of violence in some relationships but I think it's all because of love. It's just like that saying: Love creates hate and hate creates love. The really important thing I'd like to tell other kids that live with a lot of violence in their families is that no matter what happens, your family loves you, and there will always be *someone* there for you, even if it isn't your mum or dad.

## Reflections on Pania's story: Resilience in the face of trauma

Pania's resilience is immediately apparent upon reading her story. Unfortunately, the "sheer complexity of resilience [and] the myriad ways individuals, families, and communities overcome adversities" makes it difficult to "generate a single set of principles [applicable] from one contextually specific situation to the next" (Ungar, 2005a, p. xv-xvii). However, as Beardslee (1989) suggests, a good place to start when studying resilient individuals "is with what they themselves report about their own lives, especially about what has sustained them" (p. 267). Following this advice, I have presented Pania's *extended* narrative in this thesis to grant readers access to some of the factors that have sustained her self-construction as a resilient individual in the face of an enormous amount of violence and trauma in her life. The discussion that follows contains clues to understanding Pania's resilience in two parts: The first on hope and the second on wisdom.

### Part I: On hope

I first reflected seriously on hope in 2001 after hearing it poignantly incorporated into a personal narrative by Senhor Silva,<sup>13</sup> the father of two former street children whom I met in one of Rio de Janeiro's sprawling urban *favelas* (slums).<sup>14</sup> Senhor

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<sup>13</sup>As with all names in this thesis, Senhor's is a pseudonym.

<sup>14</sup>During my short work experience with PROMAI (see Chapter 1).

spoke to me about his life in the favela, as well as his hopes for his two children who were then living in a foster home managed by the small social work organisation I was working with that summer: “Here, you have to really hope because, here, it is a very hard and rough life,” Senhor explained to me. “There is no ‘way’ here,” he continued:

Here, we are living life as is God’s will...I think the dream of everyone who lives here is to get out of here. I’m so worried about [my son] coming back and turning to his old ways that I’m capable of killing myself [from the grief of that happening]. The ideal would be to move away to a better environment, but that is very difficult. So that’s the way it is. We keep on living our lives by God’s will. It would be better to move away for the kids, but...for us, as long as we’re healthy. First comes God, then health...my dream is for them [my children]. For us, there is no fixing. We are already like this. We are okay. We just keep going. (Excerpt from personal field notes, 9 May 2001)

Clearly, the wellsprings of Senhor Silva’s hopes lie in his children; Senhor hopes they will forge lives vastly different from his own to avoid his kind of suffering.

In 1979, the philosopher Charles Rycroft argued that hope will predominate in youth because desires and possibilities are “psychosomatically active and expectations of a future are ‘normally’ justified”—‘normally’ because there is little past to look back on and a long future to look ahead to (p. 15). Rycroft (1979) continued his argument with the suggestion that hope will naturally retreat with age to a “lesser and vicarious position [being]...replaced by wisdom and serenity” (p. 15). In reality, of course, the correlations between wisdom, serenity, hope, and aging are not as straightforward as Rycroft proposes. It would not be fair to suggest, for example, that the older we grow, the more hopeless we become, nor that young people cannot possess wisdom.<sup>15</sup> In addition, it is not necessarily reasonable to consider hope “normally justified” if a child’s past, however short, has forced him or her to confront numerous traumatic events or at least required that he or she tolerate a high degree of uncertainty and violence, as have all my research participants in New Zealand.

Rycroft’s argument does, however, reflect a commonly held belief that the overall wellbeing of youth in any society depends in large part on the hope they have for

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<sup>15</sup>In fact, I will argue the opposite in the second part of this chapter.

themselves and the cultures (worlds) they are part of. An old proverb resonates here: "Hope and youth are the offspring of each other" (cited in Davies, 1979, p. 34). Indeed, young people are often considered "the carriers of a society's hopes," even across cultures (Davies, 1979, p. 34).

I realised from the very beginning of my research in New Zealand in early 2004 that hope<sup>16</sup> is crucial to women and children who have experienced domestic abuse, as well as the service-providers working with them. I observed counsellors and service-providers using hope in their client work to inspire transformative personal change and/or re-engagement with life. The mothers I met at the PNWR Safehouse frequently described their experiences of abuse to me with a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness similar to Senhor Silva's in Brazil to significantly improve their own life circumstances, but with the same hope as Senhor's for their children's futures. In particular, they carried the hope that their children would be able to build violence-free futures for themselves and thereby shift the culture of abuse within their families.<sup>17</sup> Hope also featured regularly in my interactions with children throughout this research, from the first sessions of the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* to the narratives later recounted to me during the research interviews. Overall, over the course of this research, I gained an increasing appreciation for the crucial roles, practical and epistemological, that hope plays in coping with abuse.

## Understanding hope

### Psychological perspectives on hope

Defining hope is not a straightforward matter. For centuries, it lingered in the domains of philosophy and religion, fascinating moral theorists, playwrights, poets, and theologians. In more recent years, hope has become the focus of research by social scientists, primarily counsellors and psychologists (DuFault & Martocchio, 1985; Miller, 1983; Snyder, 1994; 2000; Snyder et al., 1991; Stephenson, 1991).<sup>18</sup> Most

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<sup>16</sup>In particular, the meanings assigned to hope and the ways it is incorporated into personal narratives.

<sup>17</sup>Occasionally, this hope was the decisive catalyst for women to leave abusive relationships.

<sup>18</sup>Anthropologists, too, have started to approach hope as a topic of academic inquiry. I briefly review Hage (2003) and Lear (2006) in the section on 'realistic hope' that follows later in this chapter. For recent work on hope in anthropology, see also the 2004 special edited collection of The

of the commonly cited elements of hope in the psychological literature are summarised in Rycroft's (1979) definition: "Hope...is an attitude of mind towards the future, one that admits it is uncertain—as, indeed, it always is—but nonetheless envisages the possibility or likelihood that it will include opportunities for the realization of desires" (p. 6-7). In the psychological literature, therefore, hope tends to be personalised;<sup>19</sup> future-oriented; contains an element of anticipation; and requires the belief that one is capable of generating pathways to realise desires or goals (Cramer & Dyrkacz, 1998; Magaletta & Oliver, 1999; Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 1991).

Rick Snyder and his colleagues at the University of Kansas, arguably the most prominent 'hope researchers' in psychology of the past decade, identify the most important elements of hope as cognitive ones—namely, goal, pathway, and agency thoughts.<sup>20</sup> In Snyder's view, therefore, hopeful thinking flows from an "individual's core self-beliefs that he or she is capable of generating pathways and sustaining the energy necessary to pursue goals" (McDermott & Hastings, 2000, p. 196). Snyder and his colleagues have worked primarily with adult participants, focusing on either discourse analysis<sup>21</sup> or administering generalised questionnaires to assess an individual's 'level' of hope. While these methodologies are useful for measuring variables such as hope and self-esteem on a before and after basis,<sup>22</sup> the results are restricted by their inability to account for the nature of human relatedness. Rather than recognising the fundamental importance of human relationships to hope's generation and sustenance—as in the social or relational views of hope discussed later in this chapter—they instead perpetuate a commonly held Western belief, stemming from the myth of Pandora's box,<sup>23</sup> that "hope is a feeling, an achievement of one

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ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, *Hope, power and governance*; Crapanzano, 2004; and Miyazaki, 2004.

<sup>19</sup>That is, an individual's attitude of mind.

<sup>20</sup>In relation to children specifically, Snyder et al. (1997) suggest "agency thoughts reflect the perception that children can initiate and sustain action toward a desired goal; pathways thoughts reflect the child's perceived capability to produce routes to those goals" (p. 399).

<sup>21</sup>Examining the discursive properties of hope as it emerges unprompted during semi-structured interviews.

<sup>22</sup>For example, before and following participation in a victim's education programme on the effects of abuse.

<sup>23</sup>"Western ideas about hope originate with the foundational myth of Pandora, a beautiful young woman who was given as a gift to Epimetheus by Zeus. Two versions of the myth exist: In one, Pandora's adolescent curiosity leads her to open a jar filled with human miseries that she has been specifically instructed to leave alone. Horrified to see what flies out, she is only able to re-seal the

person alone" (Weingarten, 2007, p. 13). In reality, of course, humans "are not isolated, but rather intrinsically interdependent" (Weingarten, 2007, p. 14).

### **Resilience research on hope**

Beyond psychology, a burgeoning field of research on childhood resilience has also increasingly considered the roles and meanings of hope in recent years, especially amongst "populations experiencing war, cultural disintegration, [and] structural inequalities" (Ungar, 2003, p. 8). In general, resilience research reflects a fascination with children, such as Pania, who manage to thrive in unhealthy environments. The International Resilience Project at Dalhousie University in Canada, a unique collaboration of researchers and service providers led by Michael Ungar, has identified 32 attributes from 10 disparate communities around the world that are important to the study of childhood resilience. Amongst these, it is notable that the two factors of resilience which appear most often in their different research sites are the abilities to cope and to hope (Ungar, 2003). Indeed, Ungar (2003) believes that having something to inspire hope is a key conceptual anchor to understanding how young people succeed.

### **Phenomenological hope**

The phenomenological view of hope, especially as articulated by the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1962), suggests hope is rooted primarily in our past experiences or histories. Rather than privileging the symbolic terms of hope's futural capacity, as in the psychological literature, this perspective relates hope more to an individual's fears and apprehensions than to his or her faith in a better future (Rycroft, 1979). The act of hoping, in Heidegger's (1962) view, brings an individual up against his or her past experiences, calling into question what is possible in the future, but also recognising that what *is* possible is always predetermined to some extent by the particular life circumstances into which an individual is born and grows

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jar in time to keep hope inside. In the second version, she opens a box and inadvertently lets out all the blessings known to humankind except hope. In both versions, two ideas are central. The first is that Zeus wants hope to be the responsibility of humans and second that hope exists inside one solitary object" (Weingarten, 2007, p. 13).

up.<sup>24</sup>

## Social and relational views of hope

Finally, social or relational views have punctuated the literature on hope since at least as far back as the famous proverb in the book of Ecclesiastes (Chap. IX.), the Hebrew Bible: “For him that is joined to the living, there is hope.” In this perspective, hope extends beyond the individual; indeed it is learned, transmitted, acquired, and generated for an individual as a result of his or her interactions with other people. To clarify, this perspective stands in opposition to the pervasive view in psychology that hope is a character trait, something an individual possesses more or less of. It is a social view of hope, especially as interpreted and articulated by Kaethe Weingarten,<sup>25</sup> that I believe best explains Pania’s life philosophies. Thus, I draw attention to Weingarten’s work in the remainder of Part I for its explanatory power<sup>26</sup> and practical value.<sup>27</sup>

## Pania’s hope

### Hope-as-a-skill

The sources of uncertainty and potential harm in Pania’s life are innumerable. Her parents have been inconsistent and unreliable caregivers, either completely absent in her life or neglectful when present. Pania’s mother has suffered many physical and emotional health problems, including frequent miscarriages and depression, the consequences of living with years of violence and abuse. Pania has moved schools and house many times in her 12 years and, while adapting well to these changes overall, she has nonetheless experienced the associated feelings of pain, loss, and general

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<sup>24</sup>This view of hope can be especially instructive, I believe, if one’s perspective on the past allows for the role of human agency. For example, the Māori phrase for the past, *I nga wa o mua*, translates as “from the times of front;” thus, the past is considered something in front of us for guidance, re-interpretation, and ultimately transformation (<http://www.maori.org.nz/tikanga/>).

<sup>25</sup>Weingarten is clinical professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School, Director of the “Family, Trauma and Resilience” programme at the Family Institute of Cambridge, and founder and director of the non-profit organisation, *The Witnessing Project*.

<sup>26</sup> That is, conceptual resonance with my own experiences and understandings of children’s hopes, especially Pania’s hope, in the context of domestic violence in New Zealand.

<sup>27</sup>It offers an action-oriented and, therefore, productive view of hope.

stress of being uprooted. Pania has witnessed her father perpetrate an enormous amount of violence at her mother. She has also directly experienced physical abuse, as well as fear of punishment and abuse. A number of agencies have been involved in Pania's family life, including Child Youth and Family Services, the New Zealand Police, and Women's Refuge. This involvement has typically resulted in Pania's removal from her caregivers for her safety, but never with any consultation prior to the decision-making, and often undercutting her family's own processes for maintaining the children's safety and unity.<sup>28</sup> On one occasion, Pania was placed temporarily in a foster home outside her family; the environment there, while not necessarily abusive, was hardly supportive either. Pania received very little personal attention, was forced to stop attending school for a month, and felt socially isolated.

Regardless of these circumstances, however, Pania's overall outlook on life has remained consistently hopeful. Indeed, she expresses a general satisfaction and gratitude for her life, even remaining positive when describing the painful sense of loss she felt after being separated from her siblings:

We went different places with different family...They [Pania's siblings] were all crying and crying and saying they wanted to come with me. It was just a really big loss. You know how you spend so much time with someone and then, when you're apart, you feel like you've lost a part of yourself? We'd been together forever, and then... But it was great for me in Wellington really. We used to get out takeaways, and go shopping, and go to the pools. And even when we got told off, we were still spoiled.  
(Excerpt from Pania's Story)

Upon months of reflection, I have come to understand Pania's hope as a skill, created and maintained at the interface of her social relationships, far more than a 'feeling' or 'state of mind.' In effect, through the reciprocal practice of giving and receiving hope with other people in her life—particularly her mother, auntie, grandmother (Nan), teachers, and siblings—Pania has learned to 'use' hope to cope with violence, uncertainty, and other hardships. To this point, Weingarten (2007) suggests "our

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<sup>28</sup>On this note, Mullender et al.'s (2002) study in the United Kingdom also suggests that interventions "need to take the whole family into account...[as] it is a potentially fatal error to assume that children will always be safer if their mothers leave the abuser. Post-separation violence can be more lethal than anything that went before, posing grave risks both to women and children" (p. 224).

positions in relation to hope determine what we must do...Hopeless, we must resist isolation. Witness to despair, we must refuse indifference” (p. 15).

It is perhaps uncommon to discuss hope in a utilitarian way, as a skill or a tool. However, the idea is not incongruent if one keeps in mind that knowledge is constituted of far more than ‘information’ per se. As Barth et al. (2002) state, knowledge also includes “feelings, attitudes...embodied skills, verbal taxonomies and concepts” (p. 1). Similarly, I concur with Pfaffenberger (2001) and Ingold (2005a) who regard “enskilment” as a particularly important component of one’s “knowledge structures” (Barth et al., 2002, p. 1) for helping us grasp the invariably unexpected challenges that life presents, and shaping the ways we cope with them. Pfaffenberger (2001) even attributes “variations in culture among human groups...not to enculturation or socialization, but rather to differences in the skills people learn as they develop strategies for dealing with their environments” (p. 140). Returning to hope, then, it seems reasonable that if our ‘knowledge structures’ include the learned skill of practicing hope in our social relationships,<sup>29</sup> we are better equipped overall to meet life’s challenges with some degree of preparedness and self-assurance that we will be able to cope.

### **Realistic hope: A social practice and imperative**

Kaethe Weingarten’s (2003) recent research has focused on the multigenerational transmission of historical trauma and political violence in Kosovo and South Africa. In this work, Weingarten describes a particular type of hope, the same I believe that Pania possesses. It is a hope which is adaptive, realistic, and enduring because it can accommodate doubt and despair; integrate the contradictions of life; and seek goals and pathways to them, accepting “proxy measures” at times, in place of ultimate ends (Weingarten, 2007). Pania’s hope thrives regardless of the fact that life has dealt her circumstances she did not imagine she could accept and, often, that she had no power or ability to change (Weingarten, 2007). What Pania’s life story is testimony to (and herein lies hope) is that even in such dire circumstances, we have the capacity as humans to transform our goals, cultivate new pathways to them, and nourish what is positive and hopeful in our lives. In turn, these actions can help

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<sup>29</sup>This includes generating and sustaining hope, as well as reaching out to others in times of despair or hopelessness.

prevent the potentially harmful consequences of domestic abuse, or other hardship, from overwhelming us. What must be emphasised, though, is that *none of this* is possible to do alone. On the contrary, in order to achieve realistic hope, it is essential to lift the burden of 'feeling' or 'being' hopeful off the individual and, instead, make hope the responsibility of community (Weingarten, 2000).

As noted earlier, a few anthropologists have explored the idea of the social creation or generation of hope in different contexts. Ghassan Hage, for example, considers the many intersections of hope, ethics, state, society, anxiety, and politics in his book, *Against Paranoid Nationalism* (2003). He argues that even if the ability to hope is an intrinsic property of human beings—that is, that hope is something akin to a 'disposition'—it still cannot be separated from the effect of society on its development (Hage, 2003). In other words, an individual's hope depends on the material and symbolic social conditions of its activation (Hage, 2003). Jonathan Lear's book, *Radical hope: Ethics in the face of cultural devastation* (2006), considers the courage, wisdom, and "radical hope" of the last great chief of the Crow peoples, Plenty Coups. Lear seeks to understand the role of Plenty Coups' hope in redefining the Crow tribe as agriculturists rather than warriors, in order to survive a near culture death. Both Hage and Lear remind us of Wendell Berry's (1992) warning that history shows "massive human failure" is possible (for example, cultures can be literally condemned to extinction). However, as Berry (1992) also suggests, hope is nonetheless "one of our duties...a part of our obligation to our own being and to our descendants" (p. 11). In the end, humans are social animals. We make sense of our experiences, by and large, in relation to others; thus, it is simply not a fair demand of an individual to maintain hope on his or her own. Hope can 'dry up'—it *does* dry up—if it is not nurtured by others, constantly 'practiced,' co-created.

## Part II: On wisdom

While hope and wisdom are related, they are not the same phenomenon; thus I feel they warrant separate discussions in this chapter. My initial thoughts on Pania's wisdom were recorded in my field diary on 16 June 2006, the evening following my

lengthiest conversation with Pania.<sup>30</sup> I felt overwhelmed with guilt at that time, reflecting on the situations in my past where I had lamented my misfortunes without learning anything from them.<sup>31</sup> Rather than condemning her circumstances, blaming her parents, or lingering on feelings of pain, resentment, grief, or anger, Pania has made conscious decisions throughout her life<sup>32</sup> to appreciate it exactly as it is—‘the good, the bad, and the ugly,’ or in Jon Kabat-Zinn’s (1996) description, “the full catastrophe living.” At 12 years old, she seems to have come to terms with her family exactly the way it is, even expressing profound gratitude for the life she has been able to live: “You know how people say that what’s happened in your life makes you who you are? That’s why I wouldn’t change my life; because I’m happy with the person I am. My life has made me *me* and if I’d grown up any other way I wouldn’t be me. I don’t want to be someone else” (Excerpt from Pania’s story).

The wisdom in this life philosophy was immediately apparent to me: Namely, no matter how dire one’s circumstances, there is always more right in one’s life than there is wrong (Kabat-Zinn, 2006). Pania seemed to have been encouraged by other people in her life, especially her grandmother, aunties, and siblings, directly and indirectly, to “pour [her] energy into what was right with her life” (Kabat-Zinn, 2006, n.p.). I was certain, both then and now, that this way of thinking held enormous potential not just for personal wellbeing, but also social or cultural healing. I decided to survey the academic literature on wisdom, therefore, in an effort to better understand how children might be assisted, as I believed Pania had, to gain wisdom from the difficult circumstances in their lives. The remainder of this chapter thus charts my journey towards understanding Pania’s wisdom.

## What is wisdom?

Wisdom is an ancient and esteemed human value, often described as the “quintessence” or “pinnacle” of human development (Ardelt, 2005; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Erikson, 1950; Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986; Hart, 1987; Staudinger & Pasupathi,

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<sup>30</sup>This conversation generated the majority of the content for the narrative that features in this chapter.

<sup>31</sup>Therefore, without making any effort to transform my circumstances as a result of the learning either.

<sup>32</sup>Since at least as young as eight years old.

2003). A number of qualities associated with wisdom recur in the academic literature on the topic; they describe an individual who possesses “a clear-eyed view of human nature and the human predicament; emotional resiliency and the ability to cope in the face of adversity; an openness to other possibilities; forgiveness; humility; and a knack for learning from lifetime experiences” (Hall, 2007, n.p.). The study of wisdom has followed a similar trajectory to the study of hope in academia. Historically, it inhabited the realms of religion and philosophy, only recently<sup>33</sup> coming under the scrutiny of social scientists. The renewed interest in wisdom has (again, much like hope) centred primarily in the field of psychology rather than anthropology or the other social or behavioural sciences. I draw brief attention to a few of the key theorists whose work on wisdom is relevant to Pania's life story.

In 1983, the American philosopher John Kekes made a distinction between descriptive and interpretive knowledge, which Ardel (2004) summarises as follows: “Descriptive knowledge refers to a description of facts (for example, ‘life is unpredictable’), whereas interpretive knowledge consists of a rediscovery of the significance of generally known facts for our own lives and the lives of others (for example, ‘What does it mean that I have no control over my own and other people's futures?’)” (p. 262). Interpretive knowledge, therefore, is deeply reflective and even transformative. In Kekes' view, it is essential to wisdom. Other researchers since him have built on this distinction, including Holliday and Chandler (1986), Assmann (1994), and Ardel (1997; 1998; 2000a; 2000b; 2003; 2004), amongst others. Monika Ardel's work is particularly relevant to Pania's wisdom. She refers to interpretive knowledge as the ‘reflective dimension’ of wisdom in her “3-D Wisdom Scale,” which also incorporates cognitive and emotional knowledge:

The cognitive aspect...include[s] the ability to understand human nature, perceive a situation clearly and make decisions despite ambiguity and uncertainty. The reflective sphere deal[s] with a person's ability to examine an event from multiple perspectives—to step outside oneself and understand another point of view. And the emotional aspect primarily involve[s] feeling compassion toward others as well as an ability to remain positive in the face of adversity. (Cited in Hall, 2007, n.p.)

Sternberg's “balance theory of wisdom” (1998; 2000; 2001; 2003; 2004) also pro-

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<sup>33</sup>In the past three decades.

poses that wisdom is constituted of three factors, but for him they include the balance of “intrapersonal (one’s own), interpersonal (others’), and extrapersonal (institutional or other larger) interests over the long and short terms, through the mediation of values, so as to adapt to, shape, and select environments” (Sternberg, 2004, p. 287). The distinction between Ardel and Sternberg is subtle; they agree on many points. However, Sternberg emphasises that wisdom is rooted in the “interaction among person, task, and situation,” therefore drawing attention to the essential role of *context* (Sternberg, 2004, p. 287). Basically, one may be wise in a particular setting, such as a workplace, but not necessarily in other situations, such as personal life (Sternberg, 2004, p. 287).

Locating wisdom in Pania’s life story is not a difficult challenge. Her narrative is replete with examples which corroborate the definitions and findings of most contemporary wisdom researchers, especially Monika Ardel. Three of the most striking elements of wisdom in Pania’s story are her knowledge and acceptance of the unpredictable nature and uncertainties of life; her concerted efforts to engage in self-reflection; and the various strategies and thought processes she uses to re-cast difficult times in her mind as learning moments or opportunities, in order to make the best of them. I briefly highlight sections of Pania’s story that exemplify these aspects or characteristics of wisdom in turn.

## **Illustrating Pania’s wisdom**

### **Knowledge of life’s unpredictabilities and uncertainties**

As mentioned before, Pania has come to terms with life as it is—uncertain, unpredictable, full of joy *and* despair. For example, she states: “Nothing is *always* going to go my way. No matter how much you wish, or pray even, for something to happen, it’s not always going to go the way you expected.” Similarly, she reflects, during our final research conversation:

Probably the biggest challenge I’ve faced in my life is overcoming the fear that—or, I guess, the fact that—my family isn’t perfect. For a long time, I was always trying to make myself think about the good things in my family only, but then I realised it was okay if things weren’t always good. That’s just the way it is—bad, sometimes. I had to, like, understand this

and try to overcome my fears about the bad times so they wouldn't take me over, like, as a person. (Excerpt from Pania's narrative)

Pania's acceptance of the "positive and negative aspects of human nature" (Ardelt, 2005, p. 8) represents the cognitive wisdom dimension of Ardelt's scale—a "deep and clear understanding of life and the desire to know the significance and deeper meaning of life, particularly as it relates to intrapersonal and interpersonal phenomena and events" (Ardelt, 2000b; Blanchard-Fields & Norris, 1995; Chandler & Holliday, 1990; Kekes, 1983; Sternberg, 1990, cited in Ardelt, 2005, p. 8). Indeed, Pania realises that there are some things in life, particularly the external events and circumstances of her family environment, over which she has no control. However, she *can* control her own mind or feelings about them. In other words, Pania understands that "external events ultimately have no control over one's fate and happiness. No event can make one unhappy unless one allows the unpleasant feelings to fester within" (Ardelt, 2005, p. 12). She chooses not to dwell on the unhappy events in order to prevent her fears from "taking her over" or defeating her.

### **Engaging in self-reflection**

Pania is also able to take a step back and reflect on her life circumstances from a relatively objective viewpoint. By engaging in this kind of "self-examination, self-awareness, and self-insight" (Ardelt, 2005, p. 8), she can identify the good fortune in her life. Indeed, she is profoundly grateful for these moments or events. For example, Pania comments:

My Mum was always thinking negative and it made it hard for people to be close to her. I've decided to think positive instead. I learnt from my Mum's mistake of always thinking, "What bad thing is going to happen next?" I am always thinking of the good things instead. I wouldn't change my life either...And I think all the hard things in my life just make me more grateful for the good things that happen. When something really good happens to you, you think, "Oh, that's good," and that's about it, right? But, if you've gone through heaps of trauma, you know the good things are not always going to happen. You can't take them for granted. (Excerpt from Pania's narrative)

Through this kind of concerted self-reflection, Pania “gains a more thorough and sympathetic understanding of [her]self and others” (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Hart, 1987; Kekes, 1995; Levitt, 1999; Taranto, 1989, cited in Ardel, 2005, p. 8). As Ardel (2005) suggests, the likely result “is a reduction in self-centeredness and an increase in sympathetic and compassionate love [and understanding] for others” (p. 8).

### **Reframing: Making ‘the best of things’**

There are innumerable examples in Pania’s story of her ability to mentally redefine the crises and hardships in her life as challenges, learning moments, or the stepping stones to more precious and positive events. All of these point to her ability to cope actively with hardship. To identify only a few, Pania states the following, at various points throughout her narrative:

Even though Mum and Dad had left us, when we started living in Palmy, I began to know who my family actually was. I realised how much family and support I had. It just showed me I had a lot of love from more people than just my mum and dad.

Well, the next part of my life story is about separation. That sounds kind of bad, I know, but there are some good parts too.

For me, well, I actually made a lot of friends when I was at the Safehouse, like you, Jen. We met then, so it wasn’t all terrible.

It was just, like, a really big loss. You know how you spend so much time with someone and then, when you’re apart, you feel like you’ve lost a part of yourself? We’d been together forever, and then... But it was great for me in Wellington really.

### **Implications of Pania’s wisdom**

How is Pania’s wisdom relevant to this thesis as a whole, and what practical applications can we gain from this exploration into wisdom? First of all, highlighting Pania’s wisdom draws attention to the value of children’s knowledge in general. In turn, I hope this dispels the misconception that wisdom is only associated with the elders of a society, rather than its youth (Ardel, 2004; Assmann, 1994; Baltes & Smith, 1990;

Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Kekes, 1983). Indeed, we are so unaccustomed to associating wisdom with youth that the vast majority of wisdom research is set amongst elderly populations. However, both anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that “the seeds of wisdom are planted earlier in life—certainly earlier than old age, often earlier than middle age and possibly even earlier than young adulthood...There are [also] strong hints that wisdom is associated with an earlier exposure to adversity or failures” (Parker, Buckmaster, Sundlass, Schatzberg, & Lyons, 2006, cited in Hall, 2007, n.p.). As such, one of the first steps to assisting children to cope with domestic abuse and cultivate wisdom from their experiences is coming to terms with the fact that wisdom is not strictly the purview or possession of the elders in a society. On the contrary, wisdom can be cultivated at any stage in the life cycle.

Next, in my experience, the focus of most counselling and intervention work with children who have witnessed domestic violence is on identifying and acknowledging the abuses suffered and teaching basic coping skills to address immediate safety needs and lingering ‘negative’<sup>34</sup> feelings. The *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* was no different in this respect. Chantelle and I attempted to assist participant children in our programme to identify the characteristics of domestic violence, focusing on physical, emotional, and sexual abuse—separately, at first, then examining their overlapping features. We acknowledged each child’s individual story or history of abuse, which included empathising with him or her, considering his or her resulting feelings, and extending our compassion. Then, we worked on building up each child’s knowledge of coping skills, first to address immediate safety needs<sup>35</sup> and, secondly, to help ameliorate longer-term feelings such as anger, resentment, and guilt. This is the course or outline of a ‘typical’ domestic violence support and prevention programme for children. What Pania taught me, however, is that service-providers must go a step further with domestic violence work: We need to also encourage children to identify the *life lessons* in their hardships through serious self-reflection. As Kramer noted in 1990:

Crises and obstacles in life have the potential to trigger the development of wisdom. To solve a crisis and to remove an obstacle people are often

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<sup>34</sup>Unhappy or potentially destructive.

<sup>35</sup>For example, specific knowledge about reporting an incident of domestic violence to the police on the telephone.

forced to look at the problem from a different perspective...If they are willing to work on the transcendence of their subjectivity and projections through the practice of reflection, self-examination, and self-awareness, they will not only be able to master the crises and obstacles in their lives but also decrease their self-centeredness and increase their maturity and wisdom. (Cited in Ardel, 2004, p. 269)

Similarly, Park (1998) remarks that “hardship can be an opportunity for psychosocial growth. Although an event might appear to be unpleasant, it might actually turn out to be a positive event in disguise by encouraging psychosocial growth” (Cited in Ardel, 2005, p. 12).

### **The interplay of hope and wisdom**

Learning to find wisdom in life’s difficult circumstances, especially through calm and thoughtful self-reflection as Pania has done, is not a skill easily acquired. In fact, Ardel’s (2004) research shows that cultivating this ability is so difficult that “wisdom does not automatically grow with age and is relatively rare even among the older population” (p. 269). Pania’s life story demonstrates to me that friends, teachers, family members, mentors, counsellors, and even researchers, have the ability to assist children to identify life lessons from their hardships and, in the process, gain wisdom from these experiences. In turn, this process of making sense of hardship together, or in relation to others, is an important means for cultivating or ‘practicing’ hope in one’s life.

As ‘witnesses’ to (stories of) violence, therefore, we all have a role to play in helping children re-frame and reflect on their life circumstances. While the outcomes of these efforts are not easy to generalise (for example, some children will simply not be open to self-reflection, some will be too traumatised, etc.), we can nonetheless attempt to provide children with the security or peace of mind that they are well equipped with such practical skills and well connected to helping people in their lives. As all of the ‘public faces’ of wisdom have emphasised in their work—for example, Aristotle, the Dalai Lama, Gandhi—individual peace of mind often translates into compassion for one’s fellow human beings. Thus, there may even be a social good in this kind of ‘work’ with children. At the least, as Arnkil (2006) points out, “faith in

one's variety of tools can be more important [to coping]...than the tools as such" (p. 136).

## Conclusions on hope, wisdom, love, and relational possibilities

Let me conclude with Pania again:

Like I said at the beginning, my life story has a main message. It's love. My dad was afraid of my mum leaving him because he loved her too much. And we were all afraid of being separated—me, my brothers and sisters, Mum and Dad—because we loved each other so much. Also, someone I loved was always hurting someone else that I loved. There's a lot of violence in some relationships but I think it's all because of love. It's just like that saying: Love creates hate and hate creates love. The really important thing I'd like to tell other kids that live with a lot of violence in their families is that no matter what happens, they always love you, and there will always be *someone* there for you, even if it isn't your mum or dad. (Excerpt from Pania's Story)

Pania frames her narrative with love, beginning and ending the 'story of her life' by describing love as the thread that weaves together all of her experiences and relationships. Her view of love appears similar to Linares' (2006) concept of "relational nurturing...[a] set of cognitive, emotional, and pragmatic elements that combine to make human interaction a suitable substrate for growth, development, well-being, and mental health...a love that ceases to be purely affective phenomenon and one that embraces loving thought, feeling, and action" (p. 112). Indeed the "loving thought[s], feeling[s], and action[s]"<sup>36</sup> of other people in Pania's life have been essential to her ability to cope with domestic violence and maintain hope in the face of hardship, not to mention transform difficult circumstances into opportunities for self-growth and learning.

Whether we choose to call it love or relational nurturing, we are speaking of a "highly important relational phenomenon [and] this alone should be reason enough to follow the path set out by Maturana (1996), who defined us as loving beings who

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<sup>36</sup>Sometimes "actions" were as simple as being physically present in Pania's life.

become sick when love is obstructed” (Linares, 2006, p. 111). Indeed, when love is obstructed in Pania’s life, via interventions by Child Youth and Family Services or abandonment by her parents, for example, her abilities to cope, remain hopeful, and be resilient are compromised. While it is may be difficult to accept that caregivers truly ‘love’ their children when they subject them to abuse, violence, or neglect—sometimes of a severe nature—we must keep Pania’s advice in mind: Love and violence are not always mutually exclusive. Indeed, abuse often occurs in loving relationships (that is, love can co-exist with abuses of power, for example). If a child, such as Pania, is removed from her parents for her safety, the relational availability of the new caregivers must be guaranteed. As witnesses to stories of violence, we have a responsibility to ensure a child’s relational bonds are not completely severed in the process or in the name of ‘safety’ or ‘protection.’ Rather, relational possibilities, in general, must be ensured in order that a child can continue to cope and to hope.

The next chapter introduces my final research participant in this thesis, Joshua. His story stands in sharp contrast to Pania’s. Apart from the obvious differences that make comparisons challenging—for example, gender and age (Josh is six years old)—there is no question that Josh has been negatively affected overall by the violence witnessed and experienced in his life. I present his story to illustrate the complex and varied worldviews and coping strategies of my research participants in Aotearoa/New Zealand.



## Chapter 5

# Joshua's story: On anger, loss, and violence

*I started out with a good life and then I went all wonky. Everything turned upside-down. It's hard to live with a lot of violence at your house and not be all wonky. At the age of five, I went to kindy. At the age of six, I got hit by my dad and my mum. By the time I was nine, I'd been to five different schools, and my total house number then was six. We'd moved into six houses and then we'd moved out. And, then, just before my 12th birthday, I got taken away from my mum and dad by 'bout four different cops. I kept hitting them cuz I didn't want to go with them. And they took me away to a place with Child, Youth, and Family and then I finally got moved to Auntie's place. I guess everything's turned back to normal here...I didn't see my mum and dad for a long time but, when I did, my heart just fit back together. That's how it felt anyway.*

(11-year old boy)

### Textual collage: Joshua's conflicted feelings on anger and violence

"Besides all the violence in their lives, the kids have been uprooted several times too. They've had a lot of separations. It's been pretty insecure for them. The death of their sister was traumatic too. After the baby died, I couldn't look after them. They think I just sent them away. I guess I did. I had to send them away. But, to kids, well, they just didn't feel loved. And their Grandad really worked on them emotionally then. He said stuff like "Your mum doesn't love you", "She never wanted you," "She's a terrible person", "She's a bitch". They all came back with problems. This is when all the trouble really started with Joshua, when they came back... When Josh is angry, he will always hit. He makes a lot of friends though. He's very loving, hugging all the time, and outgoing. He makes friends until he hits them. Then he just doesn't bother with them again." (Joshua's mother, excerpt from initial meeting, 15 December 2005).

"I don't like fighting cuz I hurt people, and I can make them cry, and I get in trouble. I don't like hurting them. I just do it cuz they make me angry." (Josh, final interview, 29 May 2006).

"I get mad when people say that I killed my sister. At school, this boy, he kept on saying "Ha-ha, your sister died". I had a fight with him. I told him to "shut up". And people getting smart, getting annoying. That gets me mad too. We have some people at our school like that. Sometimes I'm like that too. Whenever people get smart and make me angry, I just beat them up. I say "be quiet" and then I hold onto their shoulders or I put my foot on their feet and trip them up. Then I beat them up. Once, this boy called Devon, he swore at my friend and I kicked him. And I always get into fights cuz of people. I don't hurt them unless they get smart. Sometimes when I'm mad at my friends I tell them just to "get out". I don't want to hurt my friends. Sometimes I punch them but they don't really care and then we start to play again. Whenever we fight at school, later we're just friends." (Josh, initial interview, 21 December 2005).

*So when you're angry or sad or scared, Josh, does anyone at school or at home help you deal with these feelings?*

Nah. I just deal with 'em on my own. Yep. [Nods]. (Josh, final interview, 29 May 2006).



Josh's 'head feelings' page – Dragonflies Tamariki Programme activity, Week 2, 15 February 2006.

*Josh was really quiet at the start of the group. It seemed like he was almost ready to talk a few times, but when we called on him, he just squirmed. Tyler, on the other hand, was unusually chatty. We had to cut him off a few times even. I think he was onto his third story related to the feeling of the day, "angry," when suddenly Josh jumped in. Completely unexpectedly, he said "I want to kill myself." No one seemed to listen at all. Tyler kept narrating, not missing a pitch, and the rest of the group began to complain and fidget, growing restless with Tyler. Meanwhile, I was really distressed to hear Josh talk about suicide again. This is the second time now! Chantelle leaned over and quietly asked Josh if he wanted to go outside to talk. He shook his head "no." Now, I tried: "Maybe we should talk about this sometime? That's a pretty big and scary thing to say. It makes me feel worried." He just stared at me, then turned to the group and joined in on the other children's conversation. (Jen's fieldnotes following Session 3 of Dragonflies Tamariki Programme, 22 February 2006).*

*What's it like when you watch a fight between your mum and dad?*

"Mmm...sad. I don't want people to know. They'd probably tell everyone else and I'd get angry. Yep. I just walk away, or go into my room, or play or something. Once, I whispered about it to my best mate, but mostly everyone just listens to it."

*Do you mean other kids?*

Yeah. They just watch it, the fighting. I think that's funny. (Josh, initial interview, 21 December 2005).

## Introducing Joshua

Children incorporate family violence into their identities in a vast number of ways; for example, self-blame, self-protection, self-reflection, self-conscious decisions to ‘move on’ or ‘think positively,’ and self-destruction. The previous chapters have primarily considered the accounts of children who appear resilient and hopeful in the face of family violence, especially Steven, Olivia, and Pania. These children have made self-conscious decisions to resist or disrupt the potentially negative impact of the violence they have witnessed in their lives. Chapter 5, Joshua’s story, presents an alternative view, as the textual collage on the preceding page foreshadows. As with other participants, Josh has experienced multiple traumas in his life. These have left him grappling with deeply conflicting feelings of anger, sadness, resentment, grief, confusion. Unlike Steven, Olivia, or Pania, however, Joshua has fewer goals, aspirations, helping or hopeful social relationships, and positive mentors in his life. His own behaviour is also frequently aggressive and violent.

At only six years old, Joshua seemed to have a strong sense of self-efficacy or control over his world and enjoyed an enormous amount of personal autonomy, sometimes giving me the impression that he lived ‘outside’ adult authority altogether. While this kind of independence at such a young age is not necessarily desirable, a number of studies of children living in ‘state care’ or in other foster-type arrangements have shown that autonomy at a young age has the *potential* to be highly positive, assisting children to make “rational” and “productive” choices throughout their lives (F.B. Tyler, S.L. Tyler, Tommasello, & Connolly, 1992, p. 208-209). By the time I met Joshua in December 2005, however, he was working with all the mental health, counseling, educational, and behavioural assistants and resources his school had been able to offer as a result of his frequent violent outbursts and fights at school. Indeed, Josh was referred to the *Dragonflies Programme* by his school social worker, who believed it might be beneficial for him to have the opportunity to talk about the violence he had witnessed at home in the presence of other children.

Over the ten weeks of Josh’s *Dragonflies* group, and in two research interviews, I gathered a number of very fragmented accounts of his life. I have attempted to piece these together to write this chapter; however, readers will not come to ‘know’ Joshua as intimately as some of my other research participants, especially Pania. The

paucity of ethnographic data on Joshua's life is representative of some of the general challenges of my research setting discussed in Chapter 3, particularly the difficulty in getting to know a child individually in a group setting where his participation in activities and discussion circles was often reluctant. However, there were other unique challenges to working with Joshua. His language skills, for example, were more limited than other older participants. He also wasn't particularly interested in 'sitting around and chatting' with me. Instead, he tolerated me—perhaps, he even liked me—but our relationship, overall, was based more on mutual teasing and joking than 'friendship.'<sup>1</sup> In addition, when Josh narrated stories of his life to me in our research interviews, he skipped around chronologically and thematically, often sharing anecdotes that were (at least seemingly) unrelated to the particular topic of my question or inquiry. His answers to my questions also tended to be short and direct, or obvious embellishments (lies).<sup>2</sup> Basically, Josh was not concerned with providing me with 'a complete picture' of his life or even 'telling the truth.'<sup>3</sup> In the end, then, to write this chapter and construct the most coherent account possible of Joshua, I have relied heavily on my fieldnotes. The 'picture' of him that I present, therefore, is based largely on *my* own feelings (particularly about Joshua's behaviour), as well as the many lengthy conversations I had with Chantelle following each group session. Our three perspectives—Joshua's, Chantelle's, and my own—are woven into this chapter in various ways.

Above all, I preface this chapter as a speculative and exploratory work. I offer a contrasting view of my research experiences and participants in an effort to illuminate the myriad complexities and individual differences in terms of the impact of family violence on children's lives, as well as the ways children incorporate their experiences of domestic violence into their identities. Rather than attempt to cover all of the

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<sup>1</sup>At the least, Josh came willingly and almost always happily with me to the *Dragonflies Programme* each week.

<sup>2</sup>The 'fantasies' or 'lies' that Josh told were fascinating in themselves, however. I share a few of them as this chapter progresses.

<sup>3</sup>It is perhaps unsurprising that Joshua and I had different 'goals' for the interviews. Indeed, it was *my* hope that Josh would provide 'a complete picture' of his life, not his. However, Steven—who was only a few months older than Joshua—focused considerable energy on recalling the exact details of events and feelings in his past during our research conversations. I ultimately came to understand that every account had its "own validity...being [my participant's] own perspective and the way the world seem[ed] to [him or her], even though, like any respondent, some of the 'facts of the accounts may [have been] 'wrong' " (Punch, 2002, p. 328).

themes generated from my conversations with Joshua, I have narrowed the discussion to explore Joshua's anger, aggressiveness, and violent behaviour. Even more specifically, I have identified a number of components of his violent behaviour, including self-violence (suicidal thoughts); fantasies of violence; and conflicted feelings about violence. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion about *why* Joshua might choose to engage in delinquent and aggressive activities.

## First meeting

*Chantelle and I visited Joshua's mother today to talk about the Dragonflies Programme. We were at the house for almost two hours and, over that time, Josh walked confidently in and out of the lounge, looking at us with sparkling, curious eyes and a big smile. He sat down and listened in on our conversations a few times too. On one of these occasions, he kneeled next to my feet and gently traced the criss-crossing straps of my leather sandals with his fingers. I couldn't believe he was the same boy his mother was describing to us as dangerously violent, fearless, and defiant. (Excerpt from fieldnotes, 15 December 2005)*

Chantelle and I returned to Joshua's house the following week to talk to him on his own about the *Dragonflies Programme*. After ten minutes of easy, informal conversation about the previous year's summer holidays, Josh declared that he was ready to begin the interview: "My name is Joshua Reynolds, but sometimes I am Joshua Wehi," he said, "Granddad [paternal grandfather] says we are Wehi's but Mum keeps fighting with him about that." Over the next half hour, Josh shared a number of details about the death of his baby sister one year prior to our meeting, his anger and fighting at school, and some of his conflicted feelings about the violence he had witnessed in his family. He spoke with confidence and ease. Chantelle and I left the house marveling at his articulateness and enthusiastic about getting to know him better over the course of the *Dragonflies Programme*. While Joshua's violent behaviour at school was clearly troubling, the fact that he appeared to be so reflective about it seemed very promising to us at the time. I vividly recall saying to Chantelle, "We won't have *any* trouble with him in the programme. What were we worrying about?" Chantelle replied, laughing, "Yeah, I know. He's so cute...loving even. And

smart.”

It became increasingly evident over the first three weeks of Joshua's *Dragonflies* group, however, that he was seriously under-resourced. He had few social outlets or channels for his angry feelings or, alternatively, to encourage the growth and development of his strengths. He was tormented by conflicting feelings, particularly stemming from his mother's ill-health,<sup>4</sup> father's absence from his life, and the death of his sister. Week 4 of Joshua's programme was possibly the most difficult session Chantelle and I ever facilitated. Over the course of the afternoon, Josh became progressively angrier, defiant, and proud of his negative behaviour. His moods shifted radically and rapidly and the 'triggers' were largely unclear.<sup>5</sup> Once Josh flicked over to the 'dark side,' as we came to call it, it was extremely challenging, and rare, that we could re-engage him in the programme content and activities. Any disciplinary action we attempted at this stage was also irrelevant; Josh simply "didn't care."

The following section illustrates some of these challenges. It covers a portion of Week 4's group session with Joshua in the form of a multi-layered, multi-voiced narrative. The section begins with a series of three vignettes written from different points of view: First my own, then Joshua's,<sup>6</sup> then Chantelle's. These reconstruct a "sense" (Richardson, 2003) of the 30 minute period between the time I picked up Joshua at his school for the *Dragonflies Programme* and our arrival at the playroom. My aim in including the three voices is "to emphasize that the ethnographic text is a collaborative endeavor" (Mascia Lees, Sharpe, & Ballerino Cohen, 1989, p. 10-11). In addition, the different perspectives show the "multiple realities" of the experiences I write about (Denzin, 2003b, p. 461).

Following the vignettes, I skip ahead in time one hour to the mid-way point in the group session. Here, I present a two-column text written entirely from my perspective. The left-side column is a running dialogue of the discussion evolving in the group setting, while the right-side column is introspective, showing my thoughts and feelings in response to the way the group session unfolds. The two texts in dialogue

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<sup>4</sup>She suffered from occasional periods of depression.

<sup>5</sup>Josh's behaviour followed this pattern for the rest of his programme.

<sup>6</sup>Just as I did in the italicised vignettes in Pania's story, I put myself into Josh's place to write his perspective. To a degree, then, I 'invent' his reality. However, also as in Chapter 4, Joshua's perspective is not purely imagined. Rather, I include his actual dialogue from memory and field notes, as well as other comments he made, particularly about his perceptions of and feelings toward me.

illustrate some of the struggles I faced ‘performing’ my dual roles as programme facilitator and researcher in this study. They also reveal an additional challenge I contended with during Joshua’s group: My own negative emotions. Feelings of defeat, disillusionment, fatigue, dislike, and even anger surfaced frequently (more often than I care to recall) in response to the children’s behaviour in this group. Immediately following the session depicted in the narratives, in fact, Chantelle said to me, feeling defeated herself: “When you write your thesis, Jen, you should really include something about the disappointments we’ve encountered in this programme too. You never read about that—the exceptionally difficult days, the exceptionally difficult children. I’d like to see something that really showed the emotional impact this work can have on facilitators.”

Joshua’s group of the *Dragonflies Programme* was different from the others I facilitated over the course of my research for a few reasons. In addition to his presence in it, the group consisted of three other boys, all relatively young (6-8 years old), and each with unique anger or behavioural challenges. Chantelle and I did our best to enforce consistent rules throughout this programme to ensure a non-violent environment, and constantly asked the participants, including Josh, to reflect on healthier and safer alternatives to physical violence. However, we still found ourselves regularly ‘managing’ aggressive situations that involved at least two, but occasionally *all*, of the group participants. I was unable to obtain the consent of the other children’s caregivers for their participation in this research so I cannot expand on their unique life histories or experiences. It seemed important to mention before the narratives though, that aggression was part of the ‘group dynamic.’ Thus, while Joshua often initiated aggressive situations, the combination of children’s personalities and life experiences in his group was particularly volatile.

## Scenes from three viewpoints

### Week 4: Joshua's group of the *Dragonflies Tamariki* *Programme*

**2:55 pm.**

**(Jen)**

“Are you here for Braden?” he says, popping his head around the corner of his school building. I can't help but laugh at his smile—his mischievous ‘look’ is also wickedly cute. I try to match it, flashing back my own slightly-teasing grin. I say, “Nah, Joshua Reynolds, I am here for you. Are you ready?” He nods and walks towards me with his hands stuffed into his cut-off jean shorts. “How come you weren't in your classroom?” I say, as we pass a bicycle stand. An older looking kid, maybe about 11 years, looks up from his bike and nods at Josh as we stroll by. “Sup, G?” Josh says, which makes me laugh again. “What are you?” I tease, “A little gangster, Josh? I didn't think you said ‘G’ here in New Zealand. That sounds really American, no?” He's shaking his head at me and saying earnestly, “Nah, bro.” I open the doors to the car and Josh gets in and puts his seat belt on. If only it would be that easy at the end of the session.

**3:00 pm.**

**(Joshua)**

She's sayin, “What school does your brother go to now?” as we drive up to Tyler and Jade's school. She's not really so bad, but she talks too much. I'm hungry. I hope Tyler is gonna have some snacks for us again. I'm about to tell her I'm hungry but then she gets all excited sounding and turns the car around going, “Oh, there they are, over there, on that side. Can you see them?” “Yup,” I tell her. Tyler climbs into the back seat, and he's got that really whingy voice already, sayin, “What took you so long?” We start driving again and she's sayin, “How was school?” and “How are your sisters?” and “What-did-you-do-this-weekend?” and all that again. I wonder how far I can lean out the window without nuthin happenin. I'm thinking it could be quite far, but she'll probably stop the car or somethin. Oh, good—she hasn't locked the windows. Now I'm thinkin don't fall out, don't fall out, don't fall out... “Josh!

Oh my gosh, get back in. You're scaring me. How can you lean that far out with your seat belt on?" I close my eyes for a second and feel the wind on my face, then I bring my head back in and look at Jade and Tyler in the back seat. They laugh. She stops at a light and there are some girls waiting for the bus out the window. "Grannies," I yell at them. Hahahahaha. That was so funny. Jade's covering his mouth with his hands in the back seat, trying to stop himself from laughing. Tyler rolls down his window and yells, "Hello." I'm thinkin, What? All he says is 'hello?' That's stupid. We're just about to pass a guy riding his bike, so I roll down my window again and yell, "That's a mean bike, bro." Then there are some more girls and I say, "Grannies...stupid grannies." "Josh, come on. That's pretty mean, don't you think?" Jen's sayin. "It's not really acceptable to call people 'stupid,' okay?" I wait a few more seconds and then I pull the finger at this ugly looking guy in a long coat. "Hey, he pulled the finger, Jen!" Tyler whines. I glare at him, and he says "I'm gonna tell on you." Hahaha. "So, what? Tell on me. I don't care poo," I tell him. Now Jen's goin, "Okay, guys, the windows are locked now."

**3:10 pm.**

**(Chantelle)**

It is not on. I've been cleaning up the mess from last week's session for the past two days and it's finally looking nice in here when there's this total racket outside—I run out the playroom door and there he is on the jungle gym screaming, "Fuck fuck fuck." Jen tolerates a lot—so do I really—but this is not on. It's just not on. There are other people living at this house—women and children who need a peaceful space. "Get down, Josh," I say. I'm angry—we've been working hard to prepare this session and I can tell already that it's going to be difficult to facilitate. Jen walks through the gate, looking ashamed, "I'm sorry. They are crazy," she's saying to me. Jade comes running up to us, "There's a naked boy over there." What? I think. I don't know what he's talking about, but I'm going to get Josh off that play equipment right now. I can hear Jen talking to Jade, "Is it the baby living at the house? It's okay for babies to be naked, right?" I'm standing under Josh trying to convince him to get down and Jen's asking everyone to run around the yard one last time. She's saying, "Yell, scream, jump, get your energy out." Tyler really does scream, and they all collapse on the grass in giggles. Even Josh starts to laugh and slides down the pole. "Is it out? All your craziness?" Jen's saying. "Are you sure? Yep? Yep." She checks in with each of them. "Okay, come inside then," I say now, but I've had enough of this already. I'm going to have to be really firm today. We have a lot of work to do. I put on my sternest tone and say, "Let's see if we can calm down a little so we can work well together today...have some fun, but learn a few things too..."

**4:10 pm.**

**(Jen)**

*We still have an hour to go but I'm exhausted and tired of hearing my own pleading voice.*

"Please, guys, please, please. . . let's try to settle down more quickly this time. C'mon now, sit down, get comfortable. I think you're going to like this book."

*I'm not speaking to anyone though. It's strange to hear words coming out of your mouth and feel like they aren't your own...then to realise they aren't being heard at all either. Jade is in the other room doing God-knows-what—he says he is getting his school bag, but why? Did he even bring a school bag today actually? Josh, Tyler, and Rata are throwing toys at each other. At least they are laughing. Thankfully, Chantelle still looks determined. She seems to have elected the 'chair strategy' now.*

"Josh—this one is yours. Sit."

*Her voice is stern. I feel guilty for passing off the role of 'disciplinarian' to her. She says it is okay, but it doesn't really seem fair that I always get to be 'the good one.' She continues to place the chairs strategically around the room, assigning one each to the kids. Rata sulks.*

"But, I wanna sit on the sofa. It's not fair."

*He's got an exceedingly annoying tone of voice. I feel terrible thinking it even, but I don't really like Rata. That sounds awful. He's got his head lowered now and he's slouched down in his chair. He glares at me out of the corner of his eye. How immature, I think. Then I catch myself—he's only eight years old—he is immature.*

*I realise I'm not doing anything helpful; just observing. It's almost like I'm waiting for Chantelle to assign me my own seat. Okay, I need to act.*

“Alright...that took a long time to get settled. Let’s get reading, guys. This book is called—

Tyler—

Sit.”

*I’m proud of the stern tone of my voice that time. The dynamics of this group are volatile. The kids seem to inspire rowdy behaviour in each other.*

*What now? What—?*

*Okay, Josh got off his chair—that was easy enough to anticipate. But, now, he’s pulled his singlet off over his head and thrown it across the room. He’s standing there, in the center of the room—on a faded multi-coloured rug decorated with elephants and stars—flashing angry eyes at us. I’m marveling at his tiny, pulsing body; I’ve never seen anything like it. He is wiry, but so muscled. He truly looks menacing. I find it hard to suppress some awkward laughter; it’s a bizarre scene. Then, just as dramatically as the singlet episode, he lays down on the floor.*

*Okay. Well. Just ignore him. And move quickly.*

*Page 1, page 1. I open the book and start reading. Surprisingly—miraculously, really—they listen. For the next ten minutes, we have a captive audience. We’ve even got Josh’s attention. I’m thankful that story-reading has this calming effect with this group. I close the book with some trepidation though; the workbook activity is next. I’m certain these kids won’t be keen to sit down and do some writing.*

*Chantelle describes the activity and, again, I’m astonished: They are still listening. I take out the gel pens and other art supplies and set a workbook at each station in the ‘art space’ of our playroom. They actually seem enthusiastic about the activity. Tyler moves eagerly to his workstation and opens the first page of the book, reading it slowly aloud. He looks at me and grins.*

“This is so easy Jennifer.”

*“Oh, good. I’m glad. Maybe you can help Jade with the reading then since you are two years older. What do you think? Is that okay?”*

“Yup, yup.”

*They both nod happily. Looking at them now, they seem like friends. Maybe they are friends? Rata is already racing through the workbook at his own pace. Fantastic, I think.*

*Chantelle has sat down at a separate table with Josh who is refusing to participate in the activity. I decide to leave them alone. She’s so calm and patient; he might just give in. I work with the other kids, helping with reading and spelling and encouraging them to think carefully about their answers.*

*A few minutes later, I see Chantelle writing down Josh’s answers. He seems to be talking now, although reluctantly. Later, Chantelle shows me his workbook and it is truly full of ‘gems’—brilliant, unprompted answers—the exact ones we are hoping for from this activity really.<sup>7</sup>*

*The next activity is a puppet play on non-violent conflict resolution. The kids go wild when I mention we are taking out Mojo and Peanut, our puppets. They adore Mojo and Peanut. Tyler quickly scribbles, “Go, Mojo, go,” on a scrap piece of paper and hops around the room holding up the sign and cheering. Everyone is delighted actually, including Josh. They are asking the puppets so many questions that I’m finding it hard to stay in character as Peanut. And how are we going to get them to settle down again so we can explain the exercise?*

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<sup>7</sup>For example, in response to the question “Who is responsible for the abuse in the story?” Josh replied insightfully, “The father is [responsible] because he hasn’t learned to control his anger. But the mum is also a little [responsible] because she could leave. . . because she is an adult. . . she should

“Die, Mojo. Die.”

*What?*

*For no reason—honestly, what happened?—Josh punches and threatens Mojo, on Chantelle’s hand. He seems to shift instantaneously from happy, silly, hyper and playful to angry. Bam.*

“I like being bad.”

*And, that’s it. He jumps onto the sofa and, somehow, from there, scrambles up the toy cabinet. He’s got a stuffed toy in his hand.*

“I’m gonna steal this. Fuck, fuck, fuck. I’ll kill you with a bomb. B-b-b-bomb. Bomb, bomb, bomb.”

*Wow. I might look mesmerised, but I’m just shocked. What has happened here? Chantelle seems furious; she is worried Josh is going to get hurt. He is standing on a completely unstable cabinet at least two metres above the ground, still shirt-less, pulse throbbing—you can actually see his heart beating!—grasping that toy in his fist. Then he flashes the eyes at us again.*

*Wild Eyes. Eyes that twinkle, a dance step in a ballroom. Eyes that attract prey. Eyes that cause discomfort—a long cold night without a blanket, toes tickled by weeds in a dark sea.*

*He has Wild Eyes. Eyes that roll over glass. Eyes that slice like glass. Eyes that emerge from a forest, unrestrained, raising temperatures, causing blindness.*

*Wild Eyes. Always on the lookout.*

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look out for herself and her kids too.” In comparison, the other children’s answers to this question included: “Dad,” “Dad, cuz he does the hitting,” and “Mum, cuz she doesn’t make tea.”

*My reaction was delayed, but I finally feel something—defeat. I'm not even frustrated, just completely overwhelmed. I don't think I'm strong or resolute enough to sort this out today. Every week now, I start the group day hoping it will be different. But, it isn't. Since the very beginning, I've been trying to facilitate this programme with a commitment to being a 'different kind of adult' to these kids—not a teacher, not a parent—basically, an adult who is not so authoritarian. I have purposely not focused on 'rules' or 'discipline.' This has worked so well with other kids—they seemed to really trust me, to like me. But this group is just manipulating me, and I'm conscious of it too. That seems to make it even worse. I have to insist on some rules. It's my responsibility even. I can't let this group get so out of hand...*

## Reflections

As the preceding narratives have illustrated, Joshua's group demanded a significant investment of time and physical and emotional energy. However, working with Josh helped to expand and inform my understanding of domestic violence. One of the most common beliefs I encountered over the course of my research is that children respond to domestic violence in two ways only: They are either vulnerable (that is, 'at risk,' like Joshua) or they are resilient (like Steven, Olivia, Pania). In general, children who have witnessed or experienced domestic violence are surrounded by "pathologizing" labels; for example, often referred to as little more than 'victims of abuse' (Ungar, 2001b, p. 138). 'Problem kids,' such as Joshua, assume even more stigmatising characterisations, such as "dangerous," "delinquent," and "disordered" (Ungar, 2001b, p. 138). Vulnerability and resilience, though, are socially constructed phenomenon, and children—in addition to their caregivers, peers, teachers, and communities—will naturally seek some control over the definitions of these 'labels' (Ungar, 2001b). Unlike the majority of my research participants, Josh seemed to embellish or revel in the so-called 'stigmatising' social discourse surrounding him, rather than contest, resist, or disrupt it.

I now share three examples of the violence I believe Josh perpetuates on a discursive or symbolic level,<sup>8</sup> before turning to a discussion about what he ‘gains’ from perpetuating violence in his own relationships.

### **“I cut the man’s leg with a sword:” Fantasies of violence**

Many boys in the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* drew extra blood, added weapons to their drawings, or exaggerated accounts of the violence they had witnessed in their lives to the point of obvious fantasy.<sup>9</sup> Joshua’s stories below are representative of these fantasies. I present the vignettes asking readers to reflect on the ‘work’ of narratives like these: What do these stories grant their tellers? The answer to this question is surely multifaceted—the ‘fantasies’ are likely to be constitutive of the boys’ social worlds or social identities; they might assist the ‘tellers’ to understand the violence they have experienced in their lives; they might give the violence meaning. In Joshua’s case, I believe the stories garner a significant amount of social power in their telling. Let us hear from him one more time:

#### I

If I’m scared or sad or something I used to tell Mum sometimes, but that was mainly when I was five. Now, if I’m scared, I just stay in my bed. I don’t shout out. I might get a drink. Once, my brother and I, we saw a man stabbing a woman who was taking the rubbish out. She went to take the rubbish out and this man came behind her and tried stabbing her. Then we saw this girl there too and she started stabbing the man. We just ran to under my bed and we started to laugh. And then we stopped laughing.

#### II

I remember heaps of things about fights in my family, cuz we have bad violence. Yeah, um, bad things... Like, our nanny and our mum have been fighting because our nanny says our mum doesn’t take her pills, but Mum does. Once Mum got the pills and took them right in front

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<sup>8</sup>These vignettes are drawn from the transcripts of the pre- and post-programme interviews with Joshua.

<sup>9</sup>For example, refer back to Act 2, Scene 4 of *A Record of Fieldwork* in Chapter 3, where Ben describes to the group that he “cut off the head” of his mother’s partner.

of Nanny to show her. I don't like our nan now. And, once, my dad punched the car and he made a 'big as' dent. And sometimes our nanny, she gets annoyed with our grandad cuz she keeps on having to do all the work around the house, and so she gets in a fight with him about it. And Papa, our mum's dad, he kicked our mum out of the car once. Oh, and one time, our sister, she got hurt by an adult, by Nanny. Nanny cut her lip. I don't know how. She just ran inside and said Nanny cut her lip. And once my brother broke my sister's wrist when he chucked her off the bed. One time my brother was getting hurt by this kid, and I chased the boy away with an axe. I hit him with the other end of the axe—not the sharp end. And I got hurt by an adult too—just some man. He hit me across the leg with a baseball bat because I walked through a pub with my cousin. My cousin and I had these wooden swords with us; they are toys. So I cut the man's leg with a sword. Then I ran home and told my mum's boyfriend and he told the man to 'F-off.' I just stick with my gang. My cousin Dimitri and my bestest mate called Nathan are in it. We've got lots more people too, like maybe 15 people. We have some girls too and one is only five and she always gets picked on. There's another all-girls gang but they only have eight people. We have all the cool kids in our school in our gang. We made up this rule that we don't hit girls—only some girls—like this girl called Becca, cuz she says really mean things. So I go up to her and beat her up. And we don't hurt anyone in our gang either. One kid—he's not in our gang—I always beat him up. Once he threw a rock at my back and I picked it up and hit it on his head. Our gang, it's naughty. It gets smart, yep. It kind of makes me feel happy. Haha. Yep. I don't know why; it just makes me laugh. Sometimes I laugh when people get hurt. They just cry. It's still kind of funny when they cry. I don't ever feel bad about it...nah. Oh, kind of.

### III

"Henry lives in a family with a difficult problem," I [Jen] read aloud, closing the book, *A Family That Fights*, by Sharon Bernstein. "If anyone did that to my mum [beat her up], I'd smash them. No, I would kill them," Joshua announced. "Yeah, me too...Yeah, I'd kill him too," all the kids agreed, echoing Joshua's statement. But, how strange? I thought to myself, for this [family violence] has already happened to all of their mothers. (Excerpt from fieldnotes following Session 6 of *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*, 28 February 2006)

## The chaos and uncertainties of life

As I have noted before in this thesis, it is difficult to draw comprehensive conclusions about my participant's lives as each of their experiences and circumstances are entirely unique. Nonetheless, I have found it instructive to reflect on why Joshua perpetuates violence, discursive and physical, whereas Steven, for example—who also initially gained 'success' and 'status' at school for his ability to fight—has decided to recreate himself as a 'non-fighter.' Towards this end, I have turned to research on delinquent youth, particularly Michael Ungar's (2001a; 2001b; 2005a; 2005b; 2006), but also Nylund and Ceske (1997) and Gooden (1997). I have arrived at three provisional conclusions: First, Joshua's violent behaviour might simply be a normative life experience; second, it is a coping strategy; and, third, perhaps most compellingly, it is the most effective means to personal and social empowerment available to him.

I do not want to dwell on Joshua's violence as merely a 'predictable' or 'normative' life experience. This view is too simplistic, not to mention over-emphasised in general in research on the 'cycle of violence' or generational transmission of abuse. However, it would be an oversight not to point out at least that the attention a child receives for his or her 'bad' behaviour at school, for example, is not always stigmatising or *even consequential* in the context of his or her family environment. Fighting and violent behaviour are certainly not beyond the norms of the family Joshua has grown up in. More than this, Josh has been given numerous direct and indirect messages that his behaviour is tolerable. Joshua's paternal family is well-known in the community for its violent and criminal behaviour; his older brother has a reputation and history of aggressive behaviour and 'misconduct' at the same school Josh is currently attending; and his mother prides herself on being "anti-social," "a natural fighter," and a skilful kick-boxer. In addition, while Josh's mother is concerned about the trouble he has caused at school,<sup>10</sup> she often laughed about Josh's abusive behaviour when describing it to me or spoke about it pridefully (almost nostalgically) as "typical of her family." It was clear that Joshua had limited knowledge and experience of alternative ways of asserting his identity and personal power, or simply relating with other individuals, other than through violence or abuse. This is one of the major comparative differences between Joshua and the majority of my other research participants—he does not

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<sup>10</sup>Especially his potential to seriously injure another child.

participate in any extra-curricular activities, such as sport, nor does he have many consistent friends or mentors. His 'toolbox' of support and coping strategies is very limited.

As noted earlier in the chapter, though, numerous 'support' persons (including Chantelle and myself) were 'assigned' to Josh by his school to address the root causes of his violence and help him substitute acceptable alternative behaviours for his angry actions. By and large though, the options we presented seemed to have little impact or appeal to Josh. Reflecting on this later, I realised, first of all, that it was indicative of the need to focus more sustained research attention on "children's lives with other children" or what is sometimes referred to as "children's cultures" (Hirschfeld, 2002, p. 614). As both Harris (1998) and Hirschfeld (2002) have argued, while children "live in the cultural spheres of the adults with whom they share a life space—a largely trivial observation—they [also] create and maintain cultural environments of their own...[that is], a child's goal is not to become a successful adult, any more than a prisoner's goal is to become a successful guard. A child's goal is to be a successful child" (Harris, 1998, p. 198-199, cited in Hirschfeld, 2002, p. 615). Next, I considered what it might mean to be 'successful' or 'resilient' in a child's world and, more specifically, Joshua's world? Josh's behaviour in the *Dragonflies* groups and the stories he told me of his life in the interviews provided some clues. 'Success' for him seemed to entail being able to achieve high status amongst his social/peer groups, and defining his own identity.

'Coping' literally refers to the process of facing or dealing with challenges and difficulties. Coping strategies are those which assist an individual to grapple with the chaos and uncertainties of life. On a basic level, then, Joshua's ability to use violence effectively to inspire predictable reactions, or achieve predictable ends, might grant him significant mental health benefits. His violent behaviour is a 'tool,' as such, which he wields effectively to define himself as an individual who is able to cope or 'get by.'<sup>11</sup> Ungar's work with delinquent youth in out-of-home placement settings is particularly relevant here. He notes (2001b) that many of the personal strengths that the teens he worked with prided themselves on were the very same "characteristics treatment providers sought to extinguish: Mouthiness, defiance, a 'bad' attitude,

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<sup>11</sup>During one of the group activities in the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*, Joshua chose a card that read "I can stand up for myself" as his ultimate personal strength.

sexual promiscuity, emotional dependency, addictions, self-injurious behaviors, and other various forms of risk-taking. While problematic, these behaviours were reflective of [his participant's] determination to remain in control of...life" (p. 147). Josh receives an enormous amount of attention from 'being bad.' It was clear throughout the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*, that this attention—especially from his peers—was a source of self-satisfaction. The reality is that he has few alternative sources of self-esteem. Martin Gooden (1997) makes a relevant point to Josh's life here with his suggestion that "youth not only seek out delinquent activities because they bring with them greater self-esteem, but [they] are motivated to seek affirmation outside normative social behaviors because of threats to self from failure to achieve in those socially acceptable domains" (cited in Ungar, 2001b, p. 139).

By the end of the *Dragonflies Programme*, I had witnessed many of Joshua's serious behavioural problems. On a few occasions I even feared he possessed characteristics of psychopathy, such as the complete lack of remorse and empathy for victims of violence (including his own violence). Without question, Josh was extremely challenging to work with in a group setting. However, his sense of self was still highly fragmented and seemed to change quickly, even *within* each of our meetings. He didn't know—or care to know—many of the basic details of his life (for example, his birthday, birthplace, what he was like as a baby, etc.), but he was keenly aware of his ability to exercise power in his social relationships and create a self-identity as 'strong' and 'independent.'

To conclude, what can domestic violence service-providers, applied researchers, friends, family, and other helping witnesses do to assist children like Joshua to disrupt the social discourses which define them as damaged, deviant, or destructive children, or to replace these identities with new ones? As Ungar (2001b) advises, "devaluing 'deviant' behaviors is bound to be counterproductive. More effective interventions would acknowledge the mental health benefits of such behaviors (see, for example, Nylund & Ceske, 1997)" (p. 152). Indeed, it is essential to keep in mind—as Josh has shown me—that even where "new identity constructions are nurtured, these are chosen [by children or youth] on the basis of the power and broad-based acceptance they bring and not exclusively for their social acceptability among caregivers...high-risk youth argue that both acceptance of and power over self-defining labels is the driving force behind their behavior" (Ungar, 2001b, p. 150). Thus, the onus is on caregivers

and witnesses to assist 'troubled' children to find acceptable and "normative" ways to "achieve the same or greater status and power" (Ungar, 2001b, p. 152).

# Chapter 6

## The finale

For most of anthropology's history, it was assumed that children learned passively by enculturation or socialisation into the ways of the world via their elders, usually their parents or caregivers.<sup>1</sup> These theories were increasingly seen as insufficient in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on account of their failure to take into account the varied ways children use, manipulate, and adapt knowledge to make their ways through the world, and that children are not only the passive victims of their external circumstances. Rather, just as adults, children are constantly engaging their circumstances, constructing their identities, and demonstrating active survival and coping strategies. This study has focused attention on the subtleties of children's stories of domestic violence, demonstrating children's capacity for complex and intricate understanding of violence and the nature of human relationships. My work shows that what is often mistaken as children's uncritical 'acceptance' of family violence is, rather, the 'tolerance' necessary to go on with life, *not* approval, naivety, immaturity, innocence or an inability to think analytically about their lives (Coles, 1984; Matthews, 1984; Miller, 1988; James, Prout & Jenks, 1998; Jenks, 1996). It should be clear from this study that there is enormous value in working towards societies which encourage a culture of listening to children. Children are the experts on their own lives; they have the *right* to voice and agency, and important stories to tell.

I conclude the thesis in this chapter by, first, drawing attention to the major themes in my participant's stories, especially the ones that contain messages for

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<sup>1</sup>This point has been discussed in Chapter 2.

domestic violence service-providers in New Zealand.<sup>2</sup> Next, I briefly summarise the methodological contributions of my work. Finally, as I have done throughout the thesis, I reflect on my role as an ‘activist’ or ‘engaged’ anthropologist, particularly as a witness to stories of violence. I share where the experience of witnessing (including listening and responding) has taken me and how it sustains my hopes for the children who made this work possible.

## On the nature of violence and abuse: A summary of children’s experiences

Nearly all of the children I met over the course of this research in New Zealand had lived with domestic violence for the greater part of their lives, some from the moment of birth. This included a range of physical and emotional abuse—slapping, punching, using weapons, monitoring phone calls, threats of abuse, even attempted murders. As Mullender et al. (2002) remark in their study on children’s experiences of domestic violence in England,<sup>3</sup> “once violence has a presence in the home, it does not need to be constantly repeated in order to engender fear and distress in children and their mothers. There is often a pervasive atmosphere of threats and intimidation that means life is lived in constant dread” (p. 206). This was certainly the case for many of my participants in Palmerston North. It was also strikingly clear that the experience of domestic violence extended beyond witnessing: Nearly all of my participants got hurt themselves, describing ‘low points’ in their lives to me, as Pania did, “When Dad beat *me* up” (Chapter 4, p. 169), or as Steven, “I’m scared...because he [Dad] could hurt me. Because sometimes he hurts me” (Chapter 3, p. 130). My participants also commonly described experiences of neglect on account of living with exhausted, depressed, disillusioned, violent, or otherwise unavailable caregivers.

The negative consequences of growing up in such environments have been well-documented in the literature on domestic violence and include behavioural problems

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<sup>2</sup>This section ends with a lengthier discussion on the role of Māori ethnicity.

<sup>3</sup>As noted in Chapter 2, Mullender et al.’s book, *Children’s perspectives on domestic violence* (2002), is the most relevant publication to my research, standing as the only full-length anthropological monograph on children’s unique experiences and understandings of domestic violence. I make a number of links between Mullender et al.’s findings and my own study in this chapter.

and poor performance at school, learning and other developmental difficulties or delays, aggressiveness, withdrawal, and nightmares, amongst countless others (for example, see Fergusson, 1998; Henderson, 1996; Martin, Langley, & Millichamp, 2006; and Robertson & Busch, 1994). In Chapter 5 of this thesis, readers were presented examples from my fieldwork of how children also struggle with perpetuating violence in their own relationships where it is their most familiar way to effect change, not to mention gain social group status.

At the same time, though, the children in my study—just as those in Mullender et al.'s research in the UK—talked about:

Using a variety of coping strategies, both in the immediate situation and over the longer term. They may block out the violence and pretend it is not happening, keeping themselves busy with distracting and often noisy activities,<sup>4</sup> or alternatively, keeping totally still.<sup>5</sup> Some run and hide, or leave the house if old enough.<sup>6</sup> Taking action such as shouting, or less often intervening physically, to try to protect siblings or their mothers or to summon help, [was also] a common response.<sup>7</sup> (Mullender et al., 2002, p. 207)

One of the key lessons to be learned here is that children respond to and make sense of domestic violence in a complex variety of ways which they are able to speak about “with passion and conviction” (Mullender et al., 2002, p. 209) in a research context. Secondly, and here I quote from Mullender et al. (2002) again, not only are children “perfectly well able to talk...in an interview situation, but they generally want far more opportunities to talk to other people about what is going on at home. They also want others to discuss things with them, giving them information and seeking their opinions” (p. 210).

One of the most obvious limitations of this study is that I was unable to select my participants—and, therefore, delineate my analysis—by age, ethnic background, gender, or socioeconomic status.<sup>8</sup> There is a need, as Mullender et al. (2002) argue, for more research which gives “particular care...to include ethnically diverse voices

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<sup>4</sup>Jamie, Ben.

<sup>5</sup>Steven, Olivia.

<sup>6</sup>Kerry.

<sup>7</sup>Pania.

<sup>8</sup>At least in any representative way.

and to consider the gender implications of girls' and boys' responses about men's and women's behaviour" (p. 3) in New Zealand to further understanding of children's experiences and perceptions of domestic violence and inform responses to working with children. However, there is no single 'pattern' of responses or 'syndrome' that represents the impact of children's experiences of domestic violence (Mullender & Morley, 1994), and the great strength of my study is that it involves children directly, hearing from them as unique individuals. To ensure this thesis provides sufficient attention to my participant's voices, what follows now is a summary of main themes from their narratives.

## Parenting: Separations and multiple losses

During interviews, my participants frequently talked about their parents. Overall, parenting appeared to be inconsistent and contradictory. Mothers and fathers were the most frequently cited 'sources' of happiest *and* worst memories. Parent's behaviours and moods were unpredictable, yet mothers especially were the children's most important sources of help. Many parents also seemed ill-prepared for their roles as mothers or fathers; they were very young and/or under-resourced in terms of education and general life-skills.<sup>9</sup>

My participants often described their mothers as physically and psychologically unwell. A number of children explained that their mothers suffered from depression, aptly describing what Michael Lerner (1986) defines as "surplus powerlessness...[a] set of beliefs and feelings about ourselves [that] leads us to feel that we will lose, that we will be isolated, that other people won't listen, and that in turn leads us to act in ways in which these very fears turn out to be true" (p. 13). By and large, the children I worked with felt they had little, if any, opportunity to talk to their mothers about the domestic violence they had lived through together, nor did their mothers consult them about major life decisions, such as whether or not to leave their father. As Mullender et al. (2002) remark fittingly, "it is completely understandable that women want to protect their children from the truth [of their father's violence]

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<sup>9</sup>Pania's mother, for example, was 18 when she gave birth to Pania and "so nervous about having a baby that she stayed in the hospital a whole week, even though the nurses and doctors told her she could go home the next day" (Chapter 4, p. 163).

but...many children already know far more than their parents realize and they are only keeping quiet about it because they sense this is what is expected” (p. 229).

The most poignant theme related to parents and parenting was the overwhelming experience of loss children felt when separated from one or both parents.<sup>10</sup> Many reasons were given for separations from parents, including the family leaving ‘Dad’ because of his abusive behaviour; institutional involvement in the family’s relations; and mothers needing ‘time out’ to cope with the stress and difficulties of their relationships, depression, or other traumatic events (for example, deaths in the family). Often, extended family members intervened too, separating children from one or both parents for varying lengths of time in an effort to maintain the children’s safety (for example, Steven and Olivia’s auntie, Pania’s many aunties and uncles, and Joshua’s grandparents). The consequences of being separated from their parents varied for my participants, but shared experiences included a sense of conflicted loyalty to and about their parents;<sup>11</sup> a loss of trust and security in their caregivers; and feelings of anger, resentment, deep sadness, and painful and confusing loss.

I met all of my participants at a stage in their lives when they were, theoretically, ‘safe,’ having left the living arrangement with the perpetrator of the violence, usually a father or step-father. One of the most striking differences between the male and female participants in this study relates to the ways they spoke about the ‘loss’ of their fathers. Boys seemed to ascribe a particularly special status to their relationships with their fathers (as well as uncles and older brothers). By extension, the male participants in this research were more resentful, sad, and angry about losing the opportunity to live with—or, in most cases, even maintain contact with—their fathers. Female participants, by contrast, tended to be more reflective and pragmatic about their fathers, explaining that it was ‘for the best’ to be separated from them to ensure their safety and their mother’s safety.

Over the past 30 years a substantial literature has emerged on ‘traditional fathers’—“emotionally-distant...[men who] set goals in business industry, government, the arts, and academia over investing time and care in their children” (Garbarino, 1993, p. 51). In recent years “paternal investment in the lives of children has taken a new twist, in that more children are living in families in which fathers are not present at

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<sup>10</sup>Frequent periods of separation were surprisingly common.

<sup>11</sup>Olivia felt especially guilty about not wanting to live with her mother again.

all...In some communities, fatherhood is [in fact] an anachronism” (Garbarino, 1993, p. 52). Indeed, under-fathering (especially absentee fathers) was a significant part of nearly all my participant’s life stories. Thus, in addition to being the perpetrators of violence and abuse, fathers in my study were commonly described as unreliable, uninvolved, or simply not there (physically) for their children, especially after the break-up of the relationship with the children’s mothers.

Here, I stress the point that I do not think my participant’s fathers were good role models. On the contrary, they were highly violent men, often posing physical dangers to their children. However, this does not change the fact that children “need time for play, talk, supervision, companionship, and learning” (Garbarino, 1993, p. 52) with mothers *and* fathers, or mother- and father-type figures. The ‘Good Man Project’ in New Zealand, established by former men’s prison warden Celia Lashlie in 2004, consulted hundreds of adolescents at 25 all-boys’ schools in the country (see Lashlie & Pivac, 2004). The results, published in Lashlie’s book, *He’ll be OK: Growing gorgeous boys into good men* (2005), suggest that the ‘answers’ to social problems such as youth offending, suicide, and violence, lie in strengthening boys’ ties to the “good men” within their immediate circles—their fathers, grandfathers, coaches, teachers, and older brothers.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, being able to express one’s feelings is essential to well-being and it is something—as with most human learning—acquired through social connectedness, education, and modeling (V. La Cerva, personal communication, 10th International Conference on Family Violence, September 21, 2005). Where boys have few male ‘role models’ (especially fathers), how do they learn to manage and talk about their fears and feelings? How do boys ‘learn to be men’ for that matter when so many fathers are absent from families, and male-to-male communication so limited? My male research participants had very few opportunities on the whole to explore their emotions, counter traditional gender myths, or discuss other aspects of their masculinity with other males. By extension, few of my participants—boys and girls alike, in this respect—showed any awareness of “problematic attitudes toward women or a desire to control a partner as underlying men’s violence in relationships” (Mullender et al, 2002, p. 220). This is, of course, highly concerning as domestic violence is gendered

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<sup>12</sup>Lashlie also found that boys in the study considered international figures, especially sportsmen, “impressive” but not necessarily “good men” or even role models.

violence. What I suggest, therefore, is that anti-violence work, in schools, community organisations, and families must be gendered and children, in general, need consistent access to older, caring males—if not their actual fathers—with whom they sense “a personal investment in them” (Garbarino, 1993, p. 52).

Returning to the unfair burden of loss that children are forced to bear on account of growing up with domestic violence, I quote at length again from Mullender et al.’s instructive study. First of all, “without losing sight of preferring being safe,” my participants—just as Mullender et al.’s participants—spoke “about the unfairness of having lost their home, their belongings, toys and precious collections of valued objects, their friends, their school, their pets, their contact with family and community, through no fault of their own” (p. 208). The sense of multiple and multi-layered loss that emerged from my participant’s narratives was indeed stark: “The losses link with coping strategies (people to talk to, familiar local havens), with personal identity...with quality of life, with learning and developing, with richness of experience, with the ability to make choices; indeed, with the whole fabric of children’s daily life” (Mullender et al., 2002, p. 208). Even more compelling:

That we put children through all this as our routine response to protracted or escalating violence, expecting or demanding that women should leave instead of removing abusers, is an indictment of our present system of justice and welfare. Predicated as this is on women and children escaping violence, the problem is compounded by families having to move from a refuge if the abuser pursues them and traces their whereabouts. Any roots the children have started to put down are torn up yet again. Children see all this as intensely unjust and they are surely right. For their sakes, if for no other reason, it is surely time to develop far more effective sanctions and interventions with perpetrators so that it is they who leave or are removed and they who pay the price for their conduct. (Mullender et al., 2002, p. 208)

## Silencing discourses

The positioning of children as vulnerable beings, not yet fully formed nor socialised in the ways of the world (Jenks 1996), has meant that adult interpretations of what children say and do have been subject to a framing of incompetence, a judgment sustained by the power and prevalence of

the notion of the developing child (James et al. 1998). (James, 1999, p. 116)

The children in my study were regularly silenced by adults in their lives in many ways, including threats or fears of violence; being overlooked or ignored; and explicit “moral strictures” (Mullender et al., 2002, p. 227) to keep quiet about the violence they had witnessed or experienced. A few participants confided that the experience of being silenced or ignored was as bad as being forced to witness abuse.<sup>13</sup> The ‘family secrets’ that children were asked to maintain had many consequences, as well. Participants mentioned feeling forced to deal with their negative feelings, especially worries and fears, in isolation; grappling with shame about the violence in their families; and being denied the opportunities (especially through participation in social/recreational activities) to develop skills or pursue their interests. In addition, secrecy minimised the effects of domestic violence and did not encourage a reflective climate where children learned to think critically about their circumstances.

One of the major consequences of silencing children that became evident in my research is that when children *do* talk to professionals, usually police officers, social workers, or other court-appointed persons, they often have difficulty articulating their concerns and needs for fear of betraying the situation they have been asked to ‘contain.’ Children need to be given more opportunities—and more frequently—to speak about their concerns *safely*, with adults who do not jump to immediate conclusions and who recognise that age has little to do with expertise (particularly about one’s own life experiences) or the value of one’s experiences. As it stands, the institutions and organisations most involved in domestic violence prevention and response in New Zealand—the Police, Child Youth and Family Services, and Women’s Refuge—could be doing “far more than at present to offer...a listening ear” (Mullender et al., 2002, p. 227). These agencies still tend not to consult regularly enough with children, at least my research participants, before making serious decisions with enduring consequences for the children’s lives.

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<sup>13</sup>Recall Olivia’s ‘angry fight’ drawing, Figure 3.6, where her hair covers her face completely “because that’s how I feel when there’s a fight—like no one sees me” (Chapter 3, p. 86).

## Informal help(ers) in children's lives: Siblings and extended family

In his book, *Disturbing the Peace* (2001), Havel distinguishes between hope and optimism as follows: Hope is “not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out” (p. 181). This is a view that Weingarten (2007) appreciates because “it is precisely the activity of making sense of what life deals us that people do so well with each other” (p. 21). One of the most striking themes that emerged from this study is that the characteristics of resilience in children, including their abilities to maintain hope amidst difficult circumstances, were highly dependent on the strength and variety of their social relationships. This point is reminiscent of some of the earliest ethnographies of childhood; for example, Margaret Mead (1930) also noted that “a person becomes a subject for herself by first becoming an object for others—by incorporating the view that others have of her” (cited in Jackson, 1996, p. 26). Similarly, that ‘self’ arises in social experience is a central assumption of social constructionism. Kiesinger (1995) summarises the work of a host of researchers in her statement that “a person’s identity and sense of reality is shaped, maintained, and transformed by communication (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Carey, 1989; Schutz, 1967, 1970; Shotter & Gergen, 1989)...identity [being] a social construct built, refined, reinforced, and altered within the context of the interactive communities in which we live (Berger & Luckmann, 1966); and within the conversations in which we participate” (p. 193-194).

My study confirmed that the lives of children growing up with domestic violence in Aotearoa/New Zealand were “significantly affected by the discursive resources they ha[d] and use[d]” (Kiesinger, 1995, p. 194) for talking about and coping with the violence they had experienced (in other words, the social discourses surrounding them and contributing to the construction of their identities). Participants such as Steven and Olivia, for example, in contrast to Jamie, Ben, or Joshua, did not “centralize” (Kiesinger, 1995, p. 194) the domestic violence they had witnessed when accounting for their lives. This appeared largely due to the informal help—the witnesses—in their lives, including aunts, uncles, siblings, teachers, and friends, all of whom offered a wide range of social resources and activities for the children to draw on

for their physical safety, coping, and knowledge of alternative ways of relating to other people. Indeed, these participants in particular seemed better able to “collect impressions of themselves that coalesce[d] to form a sense of who they [we]re [strong, adaptive individuals, with many skills], as well as a narrative framework that help[ed] explain the world and their place within it. These insights create[d] a dynamic identity...stimulated by one’s sense of potential and possibility” (McCallister, 2004, p. 425).

Amongst the informal help<sup>14</sup> that my participants received from ‘witnesses’ to the violence in their lives, siblings and extended family members were cited most frequently as essential to the children’s coping and overall well-being. Mullender et al. (2002) note that adults have the tendency “to assume that children obtain all their support from their relationships with [other] adults and completely underestimate the role of child-child links. They may separate siblings or allow them to lose touch with one another, or fail to understand the closeness that can develop through sharing adverse and frightening experiences” (p. 212). It was certainly the case for my research participants that siblings played significant roles in making sense of the experience of domestic violence. While a few siblings relationship reinforced violence (Joshua and his brother, and Steven and his brother, for example), the majority of sibling relationships provided support, love, reassurance, and protection. In particular, younger siblings distracted older siblings from the violence, while older siblings provided physical protection. Almost all siblings assumed some form of responsibility for mutual care and attention. Siblings were also frequently mentioned as the sources of happiest times and memories during research interviews.

In regard to the involvement and special roles of extended family members in my participant’s lives, it is instructive to note that a significant component of the help they offered related to the children’s ethnicity and, by extension, cultural resources. Despite the fact that demographic characteristics were not a criteria in the selection of my research participants,<sup>15</sup> many of the children I worked with, including all of

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<sup>14</sup>As opposed to assistance offered by external organisations, agencies, schools, etc.

<sup>15</sup>As mentioned before, due to the sensitivity of my research topic and the restrictions of my field setting, the primary criteria for participation in this study was the interest and enthusiasm of the participants and their caregivers, rather than gender, ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, or other demographic characteristics.

the ‘key characters’ in this thesis (Steven, Olivia, Pania, and Joshua), were Māori.<sup>16</sup> It would be an oversight, therefore, not to mention the significant public debate in Aotearoa/New Zealand about the prevalence of violence within Māori families and communities before commenting on the ways that ethnicity influenced the type of help my participants received from other people in their lives.

## Māori and domestic violence in Aotearoa/New Zealand: A public debate

In the past ten years there has been a series of high-profile cases of extreme violence towards children, including homicides, in New Zealand. The names of the victims are well-known in the country: Lillybing (Hinewaioriki Karaitiana-Matiaha), James Whakaruru, Delcelia Witika, Saliel and Olympia Aplin, Coral-Ellen Burrows, Kelly Gush, Cru and Chris Kahui, Nia Glassie. A recent article in the editorial column of the *New Zealand Listener*, the country’s national, weekly current affairs and entertainment magazine, refers to these children’s names as a “roll call of shame that exists in our heads” (“Start making sense,” 2007, n.p.).

Statistics about domestic violence and child abuse are notoriously unreliable; as such, we simply do not know how many children grow up with abuse in New Zealand (Gnanalingan, 2006). It does appear, however, that being Māori increases the likelihood of witnessing and experiencing violence. Child Youth and Family Services, for example, responded to far more cases of abused Māori children than other New Zealand children in 2000, a Sunday Star-Times statistic citing 2405 cases of Māori to 2467 of *Pakeha*,<sup>17</sup> despite Māori making up only 15 per cent of the total population of New Zealand (Ferguson, 2000, p. 8). Similarly, following the killing of 5-year-old James Whakaruru in 1999 by his step-father, the Children’s Commission at the time, Roger McClay, released a high-profile report citing that Māori women

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<sup>16</sup>It would be irresponsible to generalise about ethnicity from my participant’s stories as my ‘sample’ of children was in no way statically rigorous. In addition, I accessed my participants through the Palmerston North Women’s Refuge, generally a ‘last resort’ option for families with limited economic resources. There is a high correlation between Māori ethnicity and poverty in New Zealand; thus, this alone may account for the higher representation of Māori children in my study.

<sup>17</sup>Refers to non-Māori New Zealanders, usually of British ethnic origin or background (<http://www.teara.govt.nz/ENZ-Utility/SiteInformation/Glossary/en#P%C4%81keh%C4%81>).

aged 15-24 years were seven times more likely than non-Māori women, and Māori children four times more likely, to require hospital treatment as a result of assault (in the year 2000), and that 42 per cent of abuse, neglect, physical and sexual abuse concerned Māori children (“Behind the statistics,” 2000, n.p.).

Official statistics aside, the *New Zealand Listener* reports that “as the list of names grows longer, the common elements in these harrowing child abuse stories have become much harder to ignore. The household where the abuse occurs is sustained mostly by welfare benefits, the family are likely to be Māori and poorly educated, a stepfather is present, the mother is young, the violence is inter-generational and alcohol and drugs are ever-present” (“Start making sense,” 2007, n.p.). Thus, empirical evidence also establishes a link between Māori identity and high incidence and prevalence rates of abuse.

The publicity surrounding the cases of extreme violence against children in New Zealand has generated enormous debate in the country,<sup>18</sup> particularly about the over-representation of Māori in abuse statistics, both as perpetrators and victims of violence. The exceptionally uncooperative reaction of the extended *whanau*<sup>19</sup> of Cru and Chris Kahui, twins that died on 18 June 2006 after suffering massive brain damage from blunt force trauma, provides a recent example. In a Radio New Zealand interview (June 2006), a spokesperson for the Kahui family, Ani Hawke, referring “to herself and the family members most intimately involved in the case as the ‘Tight 12’...spoke of the need to respect *tikanga Māori*,<sup>20</sup> lectured that the culture of *tangata whenua*<sup>21</sup> must be adhered to, and argued that the family did not need any other system apart from the Māori one to know that those responsible must face justice” (“Hiding a child-killer,” 2006, p. 4). The “dubious mixture of cultural claims and civil rights that...[Ms. Hawke incited] to close family ranks around the killers” (“Hiding a child-killer,” 2006, p. 4) re-fuelled the debate in New Zealand about why and how domestic violence and abuse is so pervasive in Māori families. There have been

<sup>18</sup>In addition to social outrage and increased notifications to Child Youth and Family Services, the social work agency managing a call-centre for concerns about ‘at-risk’ children in New Zealand.

<sup>19</sup>Māori word for ‘family,’ particularly extended family group (<http://www.teara.govt.nz/ENZ-Utility/SiteInformation/Glossary/en#P%C4%81keh%C4%81>).

<sup>20</sup>The word ‘tika’ means erect, upright, and correct. It informs the concept of ‘tikanga,’ referring to correct behaviour or action (<http://www.teara.govt.nz>).

<sup>21</sup>Literally means a person or people of the land; ‘hosts’ as distinct from ‘visitors’ to the country (<http://www.teara.govt.nz/ENZ-Utility/SiteInformation/Glossary/en#P%C4%81keh%C4%81>).

many plausible reasons discussed, and many scapegoats—Child Youth and Family Services, the Police, the New Zealand Courts for failing to follow-up phone calls and ‘warning signs’ or effectively enforce domestic violence legislation, particularly breaches of Protection Orders by violent offenders; *Māoridom*<sup>22</sup> itself (with claims that Māori men have always been ‘heavy-handed,’ for example); and colonisation, with its enduring legacies of prejudice, repression, forced removal of children from families, social and economic inequalities, and drug and alcohol addictions. Many influential and well-known Māori activists and leaders have joined in these debates, including the current Māori Party co-leaders, Dr. Pita Sharples and Tariana Turia, Māori Affairs Minister Parekura Horomia, and Archbishop of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Polynesia, Whakahuīhui Vercoe.

What is interesting about my research is that all the Māori children in this study considered their ethnicity a resource for coping with domestic violence. Numerous examples run throughout my thesis to this effect; for example, Olivia and Steven were able to easily express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns about domestic violence because of their participation in daily whanau meetings at their Auntie’s house. This way of thinking, discussing, and making sense of one’s experiences aloud (in a *hui*<sup>23</sup>) is integrated into a specific cultural context (Māori), demonstrating the particular strengths of cultures that can be drawn on to support work around domestic violence. In addition, Steven, Olivia, and Pania gained a strong and positive sense of identity association as Māori, in addition to practical skills and self-confidence, from the variety of Māori social activities they participated in, including kapa haka, waiata, Te Reo Māori, poi, and waka ama. Steven felt connected to his father through their shared ethnicity, explaining to me that it was important to him to have a Māori family in his future because, in his words, “my dad’s a Māori” (Chapter 3, p. 127). Olivia told me proudly that she loved her Māoridom: “I love Māori—everything Māori. Like, I mean, it’s my favourite thing in the whole wide world...I love Māori stuff because I get to do things that I know how to do, and I get to—Well, I guess I get to feel good about myself” (Chapter 3, p. 143). Pania recognised the support and involvement of her extended family in her life as being part of their Māori identity;

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<sup>22</sup>Refers to the culture of the indigenous people (Māori) of New Zealand.

<sup>23</sup>A meeting or assembly, or the word used for ‘coming together’ (<http://www.teara.govt.nz/ENZ-Utility/SiteInformation/Glossary/en#P%C4%81keh%C4%81>).

for example, when she talked about being left with her Auntie to live on a marae following the death of her great-grandmother, she remarked: “I realised how much family and support I had. It just showed me I had a lot of love from more people than just my Mum and Dad” (Chapter 4, p. 165). Even Joshua, whose resources were far more limited than any of my participants, identified positively with his Māori ethnicity. He told me one day, on our drive together to the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*, “I like being Māori.” I asked him why and he said, simply, “I don’t know why. I just really like it” (Excerpt from fieldnotes, 4 February 2006).

Fortunately, the high-profile cases of Māori violence that are featured prominently (and all too frequently) in the news media in New Zealand are not representative of all of Māoridom, nor Māori parenting (Clarke, 2006). As tragic as the individual cases are, my participant’s stories suggest there are also many ways in which Māori identity can be a resource for dealing with domestic violence. Indeed, my participants are, statistically, ‘prime candidates’ for becoming the next generation of Māori abusers (or victims of violence); yet, at the same time, their identity as Māori seems to be one of the strongest resources for breaking the cycle of violence.<sup>24</sup> In addition, whether or not domestic violence is primarily a “Maori problem,” it nonetheless demands entire community solutions. The onus of responsibility for children’s safety must fall on everyone—perpetrators, victims, community leaders, churches, teachers, family members, counselors, police officers, colleagues, neighbours—Māori and non-Māori alike.

## Methodological contributions to research with children

Shifting the focus of this chapter back to my work as a whole, this thesis makes an important contribution to addressing the paucity of empirical research on children’s experiences of domestic violence. It responds to the historical absence of children in anthropological research and in studies of domestic violence, particularly in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It offers a qualitative, in-depth exploration of children’s lives via the stories they tell about themselves, an alternative to the vast majority of domestic violence research which rests on positivist (quantitative/statistical) foundations. Finally, it

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<sup>24</sup>It is a source of significant personal and cultural strength.

challenges the continuing exclusion of children's voices from public debates in New Zealand about domestic violence.

Where my study makes its greatest original contributions to knowledge, however, is on a methodological level. First of all, I worked solely and directly with child research participants (ages 5-12 years), seeking to better understand how children conceive and understand family violence rather than how adults think children feel. There are still few forums for children to express their feelings and opinions on the difficult topics of their lives, such as domestic violence. For a few of my participants, especially Olivia and Pania, the opportunity to participate in this research was also an "opportunity for self-expression" (Scheper-Hughes, 1995, p. 418). In this respect, my work is an "act of solidarity" (Scheper-Hughes, 1995, p. 418) with my participants. I believe strongly with Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) that "seeing, listening, touching, recording can be, if done with care and sensitivity...the work of recognition. [By contrast], not to look, not to touch, not to record can be the hostile act, an act of indifference and of turning away" (p. 418).

In addition, my group research in the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*, was set in a children's playroom rather than one of the 'adult spaces' so dominant in society. The playroom offered a comfortable environment where children in the study commented they felt less "pressure to give 'correct' answers" (Punch, 2002, p. 328) than in a traditional classroom setting. I also incorporated a variety of research methods into the group programme, such as puppet plays, role plays, story-reading, journal writing, drawing activities, relaxation exercises, and discussion circles. The use of multiple methods, which were constantly adapted to suit particular children's interests, kept the research environment lively and assisted in ascertaining the perceptions of children who were less comfortable or interested in *talking* about their lives. During the individual research interviews for this study, I emphasised the story-telling nature of the conversation exchanges. In general, my participants felt more comfortable playing the role of story-teller than 'being questioned' about their lives. This technique was also effective for gaining a better understanding of the roles of personal stories in 'self-development;' in making life experience coherent and meaningful; and in the construction of possible future selves (Bruner, 1996; Burr, 1995; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Finally, I incorporated a variety of *writing* methods and modes of representation

into this thesis; for example, drama, poetry, textual collage, and vignettes. These strategies helped me to capture children's actual discourse, rendering the plurality of children's experiences of family violence into language(s) easily accessible to different audiences of readers. In this respect, I went "against the grain by avoiding impenetrable prose...so as to be accessible to the people we say we represent" (Scheper-Hughes, 1995, p. 420). My decision to 'write children's stories' into the thesis helped also to avoid generalising accounts of life experience. Rather, this thesis increases understanding of the particularities and uniqueness of experiences of violence (not to mention, life's emotional dimensions). The narratives also created portraits of children as 'real' people, rather than mere statistics.

Finally, my research methodology included applied goals. That is, this work has existed "on two fronts: as a field of knowledge (as a "discipline") and as a field of action" (Scheper-Hughes, 1995, p. 419-420). In effect, rather than working only to uncover and record new knowledge about children's experiences of domestic violence, I also played a 'hands-on' role with my participants as a facilitator of a domestic violence programme. In this more 'applied' role, I shared my knowledge, skills, tools, and strategies for coping with domestic violence, working with my participants to draw out the valuable lessons they had gained from their life circumstances. I made myself available, therefore, "not just as [a] friend or as [a] "patron" in the old colonialist sense but as [a] *comrade* (with all the demands and responsibilities that this word implies)" (Scheper-Hughes, 1995, p. 420).

## Final reflections: Fieldworker as witness

One of the challenges I contended with during my fieldwork was my own negative emotions.<sup>25</sup> There were many moments when I felt exhausted, bored, irritable, or utterly frustrated during the group programme and even the individual interviews. In *The Political Life of Children* (1986a), Coles captures my feelings exceptionally well, writing about his similar experiences during fieldwork moments with children in many parts of the world:

I found myself annoyed by some of the distractions that befell the children

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<sup>25</sup>This is apparent particularly in Chapter 5.

and me, time and again...their desire to talk about other matters, their refusal to let my abstract research interests budge them from their day's agenda. I tried to be patient and polite, but...often teachers got the brunt of my anger; sometimes I got it myself, through depression...This self-centeredness, this willfulness, is not what one likes to discuss as an aspect of one's 'methodology.' (p. 291)

The researcher is, however, central to "one's methodology" in any qualitative project. "Rather than the survey, the questionnaire, or the census tape," the researcher—Richardson (2003) argues—"is the instrument" (p. 502). As such, I have been highly conscious of my roles and influences over the course of this work, reflecting regularly on my positions, biases, and feelings in relation to my participants, and our mutual impact(s) on each other. In the end, too, I have become "other-than-myself" (Scheper-Hughes, 1995, p. 418) as a result of this research project. Most of all, I have transformed from an "unintentional" to an "intentional" witness (Weingarten, 2003). As Scheper-Hughes (1995) writes:

Observation, the anthropologist as "fearless spectator," is a passive act which positions the anthropologist above and outside human events as a "neutral" and "objective" (i.e., uncommitted) seeing I/eye. Witnessing, the anthropologist as *companheira*, is in the active voice, and it positions the anthropologist inside human events as a responsive, reflexive, and morally committed being, one who will "take sides" and make judgments." (Scheper-Hughes, 1995, p. 419)

Weingarten (2003) points out, as well, that "we are all always witnesses. People speak, we hear, whether we choose to or not. Events explode in front of us, whether we want to see or not" (p. 392-393). The difference between unintentional and intentional witnessing is that, in the first instance, we are shocked by the stories of violence we hear from young children, for example. This can be depressing, harmful, even toxic (Weingarten, 2003). The flip-side of the witnessing coin, though, comes when we "grasp the experience of another" and we feel we know what to do (Weingarten, 2000; Weingarten, 2003). I do not mean to suggest that we know *exactly* what to say in all instances, the 'right words,' or the 'right way' to behave. More fundamental than this though, 'knowing what to do' means recognising that merely listening assists a speaker to render his or her experiences, what he or she has seen,

more understandable (Weingarten, 2000).<sup>26</sup> In addition, “voice is contingent on who listens with what attention and attunement. Voice, [therefore], depends on witnessing” (Weingarten, 2000, p. 392). As such, although a simple act, listening is indeed ‘doing something.’

Over the course of this research, I have been privy to testimonies of violence and abuse that could ‘break the heart’ (Behar, 1996). Yet, at the end of the study, my heart is not broken. I do not believe this is because I lack empathy, became desensitised or disillusioned, or learned to “hold misery at arm’s length” (Scheper-Hughes, 1995, p. 416). Instead, my research provided the context for connecting to some of my participants in ways that went beyond the superficial and, through these relationships, I learned to find joy in the process of making sense of stories and experiences of violence together. I learned to listen to children with compassion and empathy and show appreciation for their life experiences no matter how unfamiliar, far-removed, or devastating they seemed to me. Essentially, I learned to become an engaged and intentional witness.

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<sup>26</sup>Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) has remarked, similarly, that “while the anthropologist is always a necessarily flawed and biased instrument of cultural translation, like every other craftsperson we can do the best we can with the limited resources we have at hand: our ability to listen and to observe carefully and with empathy and compassion” (p. 418).

# Appendices

# Appendix A: *Dragonflies* programme information

## *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* brochure Palmerston North Women's Refuge Trust Inc.

**The Significance of Dragonflies**



Dragonflies are very special creatures. Although they look delicate they are actually one of the most resilient animals of all time. That's why they have survived on this planet for 300 million years now!

The dragonfly, like each child who attends the programme, has many skills. It can twist, turn and change directions in an instant. It can hover, move up or down, and even fly backwards. The dragonfly can also reflect and bend light.

An ancient legend from North America claims that when a dragonfly suddenly shows up in one's life, it means it is time to gain a new perspective or make a change.

Dragonflies change form over time. They begin life as nymphs, living at the bottoms of ponds and streams. As they grow, they turn into beautiful winged creatures and move into the realm of air. Over the course of a dragonfly's lifetime, its spectacular colours grow and develop too. This reflects the idea that as we grow and develop our own true colours come forth.

The Palmerston North Women's Refuge is an affiliated member of the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges of Aotearoa/New Zealand.



We are delighted to deliver the DRAGONFLIES TAMARIKI PROGRAMME to children in the Manawatu region.

**PALMERSTON NORTH WOMEN'S REFUGE**

*Kia kaha, kia toa, kia manawa nui.  
Be strong, be brave, be full of heart.*



**Dragonflies Children's Programme**



A programme for children ages 5-12 who have witnessed or experienced domestic violence.

Group and individual programmes available.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT OUR PUBLIC OFFICE:**

53 Waldegrave Street  
(Women's Centre)  
Palmerston North  
Phone: (06) 355-3769  
or (06) 354-5355  
Email: [pnwsafehouse@inspire.net.nz](mailto:pnwsafehouse@inspire.net.nz)

**WHAT IS THE DRAGONFLIES PROGRAMME ALL ABOUT?**

The Dragonflies Tamariki Programme provides practical ideas and strategies to help children keep themselves safe and healthy - physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Each session of the programme addresses a specific aspect of domestic violence like identifying abuse, dealing with anger, learning to be assertive and safety planning.



The sessions also work on developing the imagination and the heart as positive tools for improving and enhancing children's self-image and self-esteem.

**Goals of the Programme**

Over 10 weeks, the Dragonflies Programme supports children to talk about what has happened in their homes but, more importantly, how they *feel* about the violence they have witnessed.

The Dragonflies Tamariki Programme aims to develop a strong sense of *self, self-care* and *self-confidence* in children.

Other goals of the programme include:

- Learning to build positive relationships;
- Learning non-violent methods of conflict resolution;
- Creating positive images in our minds;
- Learning to love and care for ourselves;
- Believing in our ability to handle what life has to offer;
- Making our dreams, wishes and goals more believable in our minds; and
- Appreciating who we are, what we are, and what we are capable of achieving.



**Programme Procedures**

The Dragonflies Programme is 10 weeks long and is offered to both boys and girls ages 5-12 years. Each session is 2 hours long and is facilitated by trained employees from the Palmerston North Women's Refuge.

The Dragonflies Programme is free to attend - there is no charge for children who have lived with domestic violence. Drinks and snacks are provided and transportation can be arranged within Palmerston North.

The Dragonflies Programme involves all kinds of methods to make the experience fun - drawing, storytelling, visualisation, puppet and role plays.

Please contact us to discuss your child's interest in and suitability for the programme, or with any other questions or concerns. We would love to hear from you.

**PALMERSTON NORTH WOMEN'S REFUGE**

53 Waldegrave Street  
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**PALMERSTON NORTH WOMEN'S REFUGE TRUST INC.  
DRAGONFLIES TAMARIKI PROGRAMME**

**Summary of Weekly Session Content**

(Adapted from Tamariki Programme outline and content distributed to member refuges  
by the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges Inc.)

*Week One: Introducing the Dragonflies Programme*

- Karakia/Opening ritual
- Facilitator introductions & discussion about the purpose of the group
- Introduction to Mojo & Peanut (puppets)
- Children's introductions
- Distribution and discussion about group folders (for homework assignments and letters to parents)
- Discussion about confidentiality & brainstorm of group rules
- Snack break
- Family drawings and group discussion about drawings
- Introduction to the "Feelings Chart"
- Brief discussion about common feelings experienced when we witness violent events
- Check-out ritual
- Facilitator debrief

*Week Two: Understanding Abuse (What is it?)*

- Karakia & check-in activity with "Bear Cards"
- Share homework
- Discussion of the "feeling of the day" (sad)
- Storybook on feeling sad – *Michael Rosen's Sad Book*, by Michael Rosen (leads to discussion about grief and "inner sadness")
- "Warm Fuzzies/Cold Pricklies" game (including puppets, Mojo and Peanut)
- Snack break
- Introduce, define & start talking about abuse
- "Head & Heart Journal" activity
- Check-out ritual
- Facilitator debrief

*Week Three: Dealing with Anger*

- Karakia & check-in ritual with Feelings Chart
- Share homework
- Discussion about the 'feeling of the day' (angry)
- Outline of the day's programme
- Storybook – *Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak
- Discussion about feeling angry
- Sculpt anger with play-dough
- Group drawing exercise on 'anger in the body'
- Snack break
- Brainstorm on managing angry feelings (summarise with the “Anger Rules”)
- Check-out ritual
- Facilitator debrief

*Week Four: Fighting at Home*

- Karakia & check-in ritual
- Share homework
- Discussion about the 'feeling of the day' (confused)
- Storybook – *A Family That Fights*, by Sharon Bernstein
- “Bear Card” activity and/or “Feelings Statues” activity
- Workbook on “A Family That Fights” (in small groups)
- Snack break
- Role play with Mojo and Peanut puppets (adapted from *A Safe Place to Grow*, by Roseby et al., 2005)
- Check-out ritual
- Facilitator debrief

*Week Five: Feeling Brave and Thinking about What is Right?*

- Karakia & check-in ritual
- Share homework
- Discussion about 'feeling of the day' (brave)
- Discussion about children's strengths and coping skills
- Storybook – *A Place for Starr: A Story of Hope for Children Experiencing Family Violence*, by Howard Schor
- Workbook in small groups on *A Place for Starr*
- Snack break
- More “storytime” – *What is Right?* by Etan Boritzer (leads into short discussion on topics such as morality, integrity, fairness, and making choices in life)
- “Strengths Cards” activity
- Take photos of children for “I Am Special” workbooks the following week
- Check-out ritual
- Facilitator debrief

*Week Six: Sharing Personal Experiences of Violence*

- Karakia & check-in ritual
- Discussion about 'feeling of the day' (hurt – emotional pain)
- Interactive reading of the poem “House of Ugly Noise” from *Talking to Kids About Divorce*, by Dr. Nora Duffield (facilitators recite and ‘act’ the poem). Brief discussion about family violence following the poem.
- “Feelings dance” exercise
- Snack break
- Drawing time – “Angriest event”
- “I Am Special” Workbooks
- Check-out ritual
- Facilitator debrief

*Week Seven: Keeping Safe*

- Karakia & check-in ritual
- Share homework
- Discussion about 'feeling of the day'
- Storybooks about sexual abuse – either or both *What’s Wrong with Bottoms?* by Jenny Hessel and/or *Something Happened and I’m Scared to Tell* by Patricia Kehoe
- Snack break
- Sticker exercise about good/bad touching
- Group discussion about promises and secrets
- Discussion about “helping people” in children's lives
- Check-out ritual
- Facilitator debrief

*Week 8: Personal power and assertiveness*

- Karakia (*The Eagle’s Tale*, by Chitra Padmanabhan)
- Share homework
- Discussion about the 'feeling of the day' (strong)
- Storybook – *Stop Picking on Me*, by Pat Thomas
- Role-plays on passive, aggressive and assertive behaviour
- Snack break
- Recognising personal strengths (Bear and Strength Cards activity)
- More “storytime” – *Rising Above the Storm Clouds: What It’s Like to Forgive*, by Robert D. Enright (leads to discussion about forgiveness. Connect the book to the “feeling of the day” - i.e. make the point that forgiveness is not something weak, but something strong. We have to be brave to forgive. When we forgive we are not excusing someone for their bad or hurtful actions. We may know the person’s behaviours are wrong but we choose to offer them kindness (and/or love)... etc.)
- Discussion about the final two weeks (children brainstorm, then choose a “party” activity)
- Check-out ritual
- Facilitator debrief

*Week Nine: Safety Planning*

- Visit to the Police Station
- Back at the playroom (depending on time):
  - Snacks
  - Karakia
  - Share homework
  - Discussion about 'feeling of the day' (happy)
  - Storybook on feeling happy – *The Boy Who Didn't Want to be Sad*, by Rob Goldblatt (main lesson of the book is that we sometimes have to face sadness in order to experience/recognise happiness and fulfillment)
  - “Safety Plan” exercise
  - Discussion about final session next week & check-out ritual
  - Facilitator debrief

*Week Ten: Review and Goodbye Celebration*

- Karakia & “check-in” about how everyone is feeling about the last day
- Discussion of children’s accomplishments & Strengths Cards activity (one strength discovered during the programme)
- Verbal programme evaluation & anonymous comments box
- “Worries” exercise with balloons
- Certificates and “taonga” (small gift) presentations
- Candle ceremony, symbolising the completion of the group
- Final “check-out” (ask the kids how they are feeling about the group finishing)
- Group party activity (bowling, cinema, campfire, picnic, etc. – children's choice)

## Appendix B: Research information sheets



### INFORMATION SHEET for PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S) (GROUP ACTIVITIES)

**Title of project:**

*"Making sense of difficult circumstances: Children, family violence and fieldwork to effect change in Aotearoa/New Zealand."*

**Introduction to Researcher:**

Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet. The researcher, Jennifer Infanti, would be grateful if you would consider her interest in working with your child(ren) for part of her PhD research in Social Anthropology at Massey University. Jennifer has worked in the non-profit and government sectors in Canada as a research coordinator, research assistant, community development officer and project evaluation analyst. She has also volunteered with a social work organisation in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, coordinating recreational activities and providing counseling and advice for street children. More recently, Jennifer worked with children in São Paulo, Brazil on environmental education projects. She is currently a volunteer youth worker at the Kelvin Grove Afterschool Programme (*Considering Kai*) in Palmerston North and a women and children's advocate at the Palmerston North Women's Refuge. Jennifer's research in New Zealand will be supervised by Dr.'s Peggy Trawick and Sita Venkateswar who each have experience working with women, children and other community members on sensitive research topics in a number of countries and settings.

**Summary of Project:**

Every year an increasing number of children witness violence in their homes – the psychological, physical, sexual, economic or spiritual violence inflicted by someone with a close relationship or emotional bond to the child (such as a parent or sibling).<sup>1</sup> For many reasons, however, little is known about children's understandings of family violence. As a consequence, current advocacy, counseling, education and violence-prevention programmes do not necessarily reflect children's realities or the types of services children consider most valuable or helpful. This project, therefore, seeks to encourage children to express their general views on violence in their homes and communities in order to address the inadequacies or shortcomings of existing services and programmes.

**Participant Recruitment & Involvement:**

The researcher, Jennifer, would like to record notes from some of the group activities and discussions that take place during the Dragonflies Tamariki Programme. For example, Jennifer will record some of your child(ren)'s thoughts and perceptions during group discussions and activities, as we:

1. Talk about and define the word 'abuse' and the differences between abusive and non-abusive behaviours;

<sup>1</sup> Definition adapted from the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges of New Zealand. See: <http://www.womensrefuge.org.nz/understand01.asp>.



2. Learn that abuse is not okay under any circumstances;
3. Explore different feelings and learn different skills on how to manage emotions arising from experiences of abuse; and
4. Identify personal safety plans.

At the end of the Dragonflies Tamariki Programme, when Jennifer has written summaries from the group activities and discussions that your child participates in, she will send your child an invitation to discuss the notes with her in order to ensure they are accurate and reflective of his/her actual experiences.

If you are interested in the research project and would like to schedule a meeting to discuss your child's potential participation in it, please contact Jennifer by telephone or email to arrange a time. Jennifer would be delighted to discuss the project with you in more detail. Following this meeting, if you decide to grant permission to Jennifer to record notes from the group discussions and activities that your child(ren) is part of, Jennifer would like to meet with your child(ren) to present him/her with information about the project and discuss whether or not he/she is comfortable with participating.

**Potential Benefits:**

This project is about challenging the silence surrounding domestic violence and the stigma that is often attached to children who witness it; thus, participating in it will provide a space for children to voice their views on family violence and their suggestions for alternative non-violent methods of conflict resolution. It is possible that participants will gain a sense of satisfaction, pride and self-confidence as a result of being able to share their knowledge with the researcher and, simply, have their concerns taken seriously. In addition, the project will provide participant children with the opportunity to develop their critical thinking skills, i.e. how to access information and discern its degree of importance. Participating in the research will also be an opportunity for children to build new friendships, widen their support networks, learn new co-operation and collaboration skills and be part of a positive form of intergenerational communication.

**Potential Risks & Child Protection Protocol:**

There are no physical risks or discomforts foreseeable for research participants in the proposed project, but it is possible that some participants may experience embarrassment or emotional distress because of the sensitive nature of family violence. Jennifer's overarching concern is to protect the physical, social and psychological well-being of the participants in her study. Both Jennifer and her supervisors believe that the potential risks are reasonable in relation to the potential benefits of the project for the participants, and longer-term benefits to society as a whole. If, however, your child does experience any kind of emotional discomfort as a result of participating in the project, Jennifer has a network of contacts involved in work with women and children and can provide you with information about counseling, advocacy, support and information services after discussing her concerns with both you and your child.

In addition, Jennifer is obliged by Massey University's code of ethical conduct for research to ensure her research participants are free from risk of harm. In essence, your child's safety is of paramount importance. Because of this, if your child discloses any information during the group discussions and activities, or if Jennifer suspects he/she is at risk of harm, Jennifer will discuss her concerns with him/her following the group session and tell him/her that she will have to inform her supervisor, Peggy. Jennifer will talk to Peggy within 24 hours of the group session and they will decide together if further action should be taken. If so, they will contact you to set up a meeting to



discuss their concerns directly. Following a meeting with you, if they still have concerns about your child's safety, they may need to inform a professional who can act on the information appropriately. This could include filing a report with Child, Youth and Family Services (CYFS) or the Police.

#### **Project Procedures:**

Any information that Jennifer collects from discussions and activities with participating children may be used for her university studies and might be published in her thesis or presented at conferences. However, every attempt to preserve confidentiality will be taken at all times. Names and other identifying information will never be used in any presentation or paper that is based on results from this research. During the project, information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at Massey University and the researcher will be the only individual with access to it. At the end of the project, any personal information (i.e. consent forms) will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University's research policy, data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

#### **Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Rights:**

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation to grant permission to your child(ren) to participate in this research project. If you decide, however, to allow your child(ren) to participate, please know that you have the right to:

- o Withdraw your child(ren) from the research at any time with no consequences;
- o Ask any questions about the study at any time;
- o Provide information on the understanding that your name, or your child(ren)'s name, will not be used unless you give permission to the research;
- o Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

#### **Questions:**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research project, after reading this Information Sheet or at any time in the future, please feel free to contact the researcher, Jennifer Infanti, or her supervisor, Peggy Trawick. Both would be very happy to discuss the project in further detail with you.

Jennifer Infanti  
Department of Social Anthropology  
Massey University  
(06) 356-9099 ext. 2514  
jeninfanti@yahoo.ca

Peggy Trawick  
Department of Social Anthropology  
Massey University  
(06) 350-5799 ext. 2513  
m.trawick@massey.ac.nz

*This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Application 04/181. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email [humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz).*



## **INFORMATION SHEET for PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S) (Interviews)**

Dear Parents/Caregivers:

As your child's *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* comes to an end, I would like to remind you of the research I am also conducting for my degree in Social Anthropology at Massey University. For this research, I am talking to children (ages 5-12) about their experiences of family violence and childhood in general in New Zealand. I would be grateful if you would consider granting your child permission to participate in a research interview with me now for this project. The following Information Sheet briefly outlines the goals, methods, and requirements of research participants for the interviews. Thank you very much in advance for taking the time to read it.

### **Summary of Project:**

Every year a significant number of children witness violence in their homes in New Zealand, yet we still know very little about how children actually understand or make sense of family violence. As a consequence, counseling, education, and violence-prevention programmes for children do not necessarily reflect the types of services that children consider valuable or even helpful. By talking to children about their views on family violence in a research interview, I am attempting to address the inadequacies of existing services and programmes.

The interview is not designed to draw out any kind of emotional response(s) from the children involved, but simply to find out how children make sense of their worlds and, more practically, the kinds of services they feel would be most helpful for children who are currently confronting violence in their homes. Also, on a more general level, I would like to better understand how children perceive their social roles in New Zealand, especially in the context of domestic abuse.

### **What is Required of your Child?**

During the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*, we talked about a number of aspects of family violence and many feelings that result when children are forced to live with fighting in their homes. I would like to continue these kinds of discussions with your child in an individual context (research interview). During the interview, I will invite your child to share his or her experiences of family violence, how the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme* met his or her needs (or not), and what we could do differently to make the programme more effective.

### **Confidentiality:**

If you consent to allowing your child to participate in this research, I will **ALWAYS** take all possible measures to ensure your child's anonymity is preserved. This means that although I may use information from the research interview, your child's name and other identifying information will never be used in any presentation or paper based on this research. In addition, all information gathered for my research will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at Massey University and I will be the only person with access to it. At the end of the project, any personal information with identifying details about your child (i.e. consent forms) will be destroyed.



**Why Should Your Child Participate?**

Children are rarely consulted in research and, because of this, I believe they gain a sense of satisfaction, pride and self-confidence when they are able to share their knowledge in a “formal” way. Children are the experts on their own lives and it is important we consult with them directly about the things that are important to them. In addition, participating in the research has the added benefits of helping children develop their critical thinking skills and being part of a positive form of inter-generational communication.

**Parent/Caregiver Rights:**

You are under no obligation to grant permission for your child to participate in this research project. Also, if you decide to grant your child permission, please know that you always have the right to ask any questions about the study (at any time) and be given a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

**Questions/Comments:**

If you have any questions about the research project after reading this Information Sheet or at any time in the future, please contact me. I would be delighted to discuss the project with you in more detail.

Yours truly,

Jennifer Infanti  
PhD Candidate, Department of Social Anthropology  
Massey University, Palmerston North  
Ph: (06) 356-9099 ext. 2342 (work) / (06) 359-5411 (home) / 021 059 7263 (mobile)  
Email: jeninfanti@yahoo.ca

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If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey  
University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email  
humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz.*



**Massey University**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
School of People, Environment and Planning**

**INFORMATION SHEET for PARTICIPANTS  
(Group Activities)**

**INTRODUCTION**

My name is Jennifer Infanti. I am a student at Massey University in Palmerston North. I am writing a report for my university work about the types of programmes that are most helpful for children who see or hear a lot of fighting in their homes. I don't know what children really think about the help they receive from counselors, social workers, teachers or other individuals when they seek it. If you agree, I would like to write down some of your words during the group activities and discussions during the Dragonflies Tamariki Programme. The report I will write will help let adults know what children feel and believe about the fighting that happens in homes.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN?**

During some of the group discussions and activities I might write in my notebook so that I can remember what you and other children said for my report. Later, I will transfer the words from my notebook to my computer. No one will see the words except me and, after I finish the project, the words will be locked away for 5 years. Then they will be destroyed, so that no one will ever see them except me. If you'd like, you can have a copy of your words to keep too.

When I write my report, I might write about some of the things you have talked about in the Dragonflies Tamariki Programme but I won't use your name, so no one will know they are your words. If you'd like, you can choose a false name for yourself that I will use in the report that I write. I will also send you an invitation to talk about the report I write in case there is anything you want to change about the words or to see if you have some ideas for me about how to present the report to other people.

If you have any worries any time during the Dragonflies Tamariki Programme you can come and talk to me. I will keep everything private unless I think that you might not be safe. If I think you might not be safe, I will talk to you about my concerns and see who you think we should talk to in order to keep you safe. Then, I might have to tell some other adults who can help keep you safe.

Your parent(s) have said that it is okay for me to talk with you today, but if you don't want to talk with me, that's fine too. I won't write down anything you say unless you tell me it is okay. You can ask me any questions you like before you say it is okay to write down some of your words during the group discussions and activities. You won't get in any trouble if you ask me not to write anything.

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO READ THIS INFORMATION SHEET!**

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## **INFORMATION SHEET for PARTICIPANTS** (Interviews)

### **INTRODUCTION**

You know me now from the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*, but I am also a student at Massey University in Palmerston North. For my studies, I am writing a report about children's experiences and feelings of fighting in their homes. I would also like to know more about the types of programmes that are most helpful for children who see or hear a lot of fighting in their homes. If you agree, I would like you to tell me what you think could be done to help kids who see a lot of fighting in their homes. The report I will write should help adults learn about what children really feel and believe about the fighting.

### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE INTERVIEW?**

You don't have to talk to me if you don't want to, and you won't get in trouble if you don't talk either. If you do want to talk to me though, it's not like a test – there are no right or wrong answers. We will have a conversation and I will ask you some questions and you can ask me some questions too. During our talk, I will turn on my tape-recorder so that I can remember what we say for my report. If you want to turn off the tape-record at any time though, you can and that's okay. Also, if you want to stop talking at any time and leave, that's okay too. If you only want to answer a few of the questions instead of all of the questions, that is also okay.

Later, I will listen to the tape and type the words from our interview on my computer. No one will see the words (or hear the tape) except me, although you can have a copy of both if you'd like. After I finish the project, the words and tape will be locked away for 5 years. Then they will be destroyed, so no one will ever see them except me.

When I write my report, I might write about some of the things you have talked about but I won't use your name so no one will know they are your words. If you'd like, you can choose a false name for yourself that I will use in the report I write.

If you have any worries at any time during our talk you can tell me about them. I will keep everything private unless I think that you might not be safe. If I think you might not be safe, I will talk to you about my concerns and we can discuss who you think we should talk to in order to keep you safe. Then, I might have to tell some other adults who can help keep you safe.

Your parent(s) have said that it is okay for me to talk with you today, but if you don't want to talk with me, that's fine too. You can ask me any questions you like before you say it is okay to talk to you.

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO READ THIS INFORMATION SHEET!**

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## Appendix C: Research consent forms




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**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY**  
**School of People, Environment and Planning**

*"Making sense of difficult circumstances: Children, family violence and fieldwork to effect change in New Zealand."*

**CONSENT FORM for PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S)**  
**(GROUP ACTIVITIES)**

**This form will be held for a period of five (5) years.**

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and have also had the details of the study explained to me. I have read a copy of my child's information sheet and consent forms. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I am free to request further information, or ask questions, at any time.

*I know that:*

1. Jennifer may write about some of the group discussions and activities that my child/ren participate in during the Dragonflies Tamariki Programme.
2. My child's participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
3. I am free to withdraw my child from the project at any time without any disadvantage to my child.
4. The personal information and research data related to my child (names, consent forms, written notes, drawings, etc.) will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which they will be destroyed.
5. Jennifer Infanti is the only individual who will have access to the personal information about my child.
6. The results of the project may be published but my child's confidentiality will be preserved.
7. If my child discloses any information during or after the group sessions that Jennifer and her research supervisor believe may indicate he/she is at risk of harm, Jennifer may have to contact a professional about these concerns.
8. I can talk to Jennifer and/or her supervisor, Peggy Trawick, should I have any questions about the project or if any issues arise from this project for my child or me.

I give consent for my child, \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name), to participate in this research project under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to child: \_\_\_\_\_



**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY**  
**School of People, Environment and Planning**

*"Making sense of difficult circumstances: Children, family violence and fieldwork to effect change in New Zealand."*

**CONSENT FORM for PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S)**  
**(INTERVIEWS)**

**This form will be held for a period of five (5) years.**

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and have also had the details of the study explained to me. I have read a copy of my child's information sheet and consent forms. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I am free to request further information, or ask questions, at any time.

*I know that:*

1. My child's participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
2. I am free to withdraw my child from the project at any time without any disadvantage to my child.
3. The personal information and research data on my child (names, consent forms, audio-tapes and transcripts) will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.
4. Nothing my child says will be recorded without my child's consent.
5. The researcher, Jennifer Infanti, is the only individual who will have access to the personal information, audio-tapes and transcripts of my child's interview.
6. The results of the project may be published but my child's confidentiality will be preserved.
7. If my child discloses any information during or after the interview that Jennifer and her research supervisor believe may indicate he/she is at risk of harm, Jennifer may have to contact a professional about these concerns.
8. I can talk to Jennifer and/or her supervisor, Peggy Trawick, should I have any questions about the project or if any issues arise from this project for my child or me.

I give consent for my child, \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name), to participate in this research project under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

I agree/do not agree to the interview with my child being audio-taped.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to child: \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent/Caregiver Consent Form for Child to Attend the  
Palmerston North Women's Refuge *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme***

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (parent/caregiver), give the Palmerston North Women's Refuge consent for my child, \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name), to attend the Dragonflies Tamariki Programme. I understand that the programme begins the week of \_\_/\_\_/\_\_ (date) at \_\_\_\_\_ (time) and will run for 10 sessions, finishing on the week of \_\_/\_\_/\_\_ (date).

As it is part of the facilitator's job to keep the children attending the Tamariki Programme safe, I understand that if there is any reason to believe that my child is being harmed or is unsafe, they will discuss this with me. If there are serious concerns about my child's safety, I understand that the matter may be referred to Child, Youth and Family Services. I will be informed of any such action.

I understand that the specific content of the programme sessions between my child and the facilitators will remain confidential and my child has the right not to share information from the programme with me. General requests of my child's progress may be made by me under this agreement.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Caregiver

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Facilitator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



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**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
School of People, Environment and Planning**

**CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS  
(Group Activities)**

**This form will be held for a period of five (5) years.**

Jennifer has told me that:

1. She is writing a report for her university work.  
YES or NO (circle one).
2. She will write notes about some of the things I talk about during the *Dragonflies* group discussions and activities, but she won't use my name. I agree that this is OK.  
YES or NO (circle one).
3. If I don't want Jennifer to record notes about what I say, I can ask her not to and she will stop.  
YES or NO (circle one).
4. The notes that Jennifer takes will only be seen by her and they will be kept safe and private at all times.  
YES or NO (circle one).
5. If I have any worries about the group discussions or activities or anything else, I can talk with Jennifer.  
YES or NO (circle one).
6. If Jennifer is worried about me, she will talk to me about it, and she may have to tell another adult in order to help me stay safe.  
YES or NO (circle one).

I AGREE / DO NOT AGREE (circle one) that it is OK for Jennifer to record notes from the group discussions and activities I participate in at the *Dragonflies Tamariki Programme*.

\_\_\_\_\_ (I agree)      Date \_\_\_\_\_  
(print name here)

\_\_\_\_\_ (I agree)  
(sign name here)




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**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY**  
**School of People, Environment and Planning**

**CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**  
**(Interviews)**

**This form will be held for a period of five (5) years.**

Jen has told me that:

1. She is writing a report for her university work.  
 YES or NO (circle one).
2. She will tape-record our interview and write about some of the things I say in her report, but she won't use my name. I agree that this is OK.  
 YES or NO (circle one).
3. If I don't want Jen to tape-record something I say during the interview I can ask her to stop the tape and she will. I can also stop the tape recorder myself.  
 YES or NO (circle one).
4. Jen's notes and tapes will be kept safe and private at all times.  
 YES or NO (circle one).
5. If I have any questions or worries about the interview or anything else, I can talk to Jen about them.  
 YES or NO (circle one).
6. If Jen is worried about me, she will talk to me about it, and she may have to tell another adult in order to help me stay safe.  
 YES or NO (circle one).

I AGREE / DO NOT AGREE (circle one) that it is OK for Jen to write about our interview today.

\_\_\_\_\_ (I agree)                      Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 (print name here)

\_\_\_\_\_ (I agree)  
 (sign name here)

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