

Domestic violence a priority for police

POLICE have identified domestic violence as a priority problem for the Cook Islands and to that end are working with representatives of the Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme (PPDVP) this week.

John Robinson, PPDVP police mentor to the Cook Islands, has been working with local police for four years, and said he has noticed a change in their general attitude toward domestic violence.

"We can see the difference with police," Robinson said. "We can see they're now taking domestic violence seriously, and we would hope the public is noticing a change."

Robinson and PPDVP programme manager Cam Ronald noted, however, that battling domestic violence is not just the responsibility of police.

Instead, the focus should be on changing the way the community as a whole handles the problem, and Robinson and Ronald said that it is up to the public to initiate that change.

"It is your business what happens next door, because you're part of a community," Robinson said. "The idea that your house is your castle is no longer relevant."

Ronald agreed that fighting domestic violence begins and ends with the community.

"Friends and neighbours need

to make the call, because that's a lifeline for victims. Sometimes it is hard to speak out, but you might be saving a life," he said.

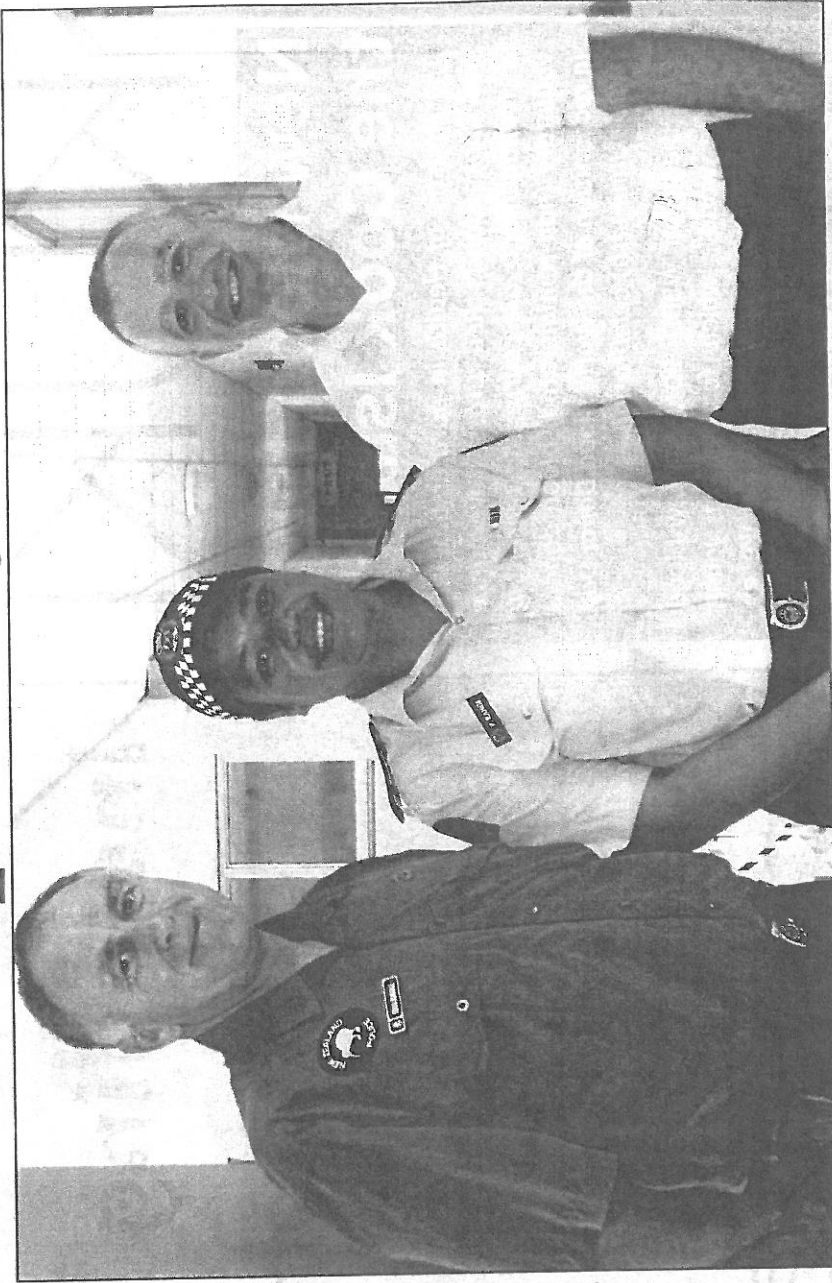
Robinson and Ronald noted that it's not productive to point the finger at the court system or the victims who withdraw their complaints – rather, it is about taking an approach that emphasises widespread change throughout the entire community.

"It's not a blame game – it's just better to get the training out there," Ronald said.

He said that the next step for PPDVP is working with police and the public to understand the way that domestic violence affects an entire family.

"People forget that it's not just between a man and a woman," Ronald said. "We want to get them to see the harm that (domestic violence) brings to families and the impact it has on children. It's creating another generation of abusers, because (children) grow up thinking it's normal, and as they get older they mirror that behaviour."

The pair plan to return to Rarotonga later this year to work with the court, Punanga Taaturu, police and local churches on drafting what they termed a 'safety plan', which will address the issue of managing domestic violence and all the factors that



Domestic violence coordinator Pauline Rangī with PPDVP police mentor to the Cook Islands John Robinson (left) and programme manager Cam Ronald (right). TOP LEFT: SUZ

give rise to it, including money and alcohol.

They plan to conduct another survey canvassing local opinions and attitudes toward domestic violence to track whether those have changed at all since the first survey four years ago.

But in the meantime, they are

also working with justices of the peace and court registrars on a whole range of court-related issues, including domestic violence hearings.

A range of mechanisms are in place to ensure that domestic violence is not pushed to the back burner, 'but it still takes time' to

fight something like this, Ronald said.

Detective inspector Akataura Matapo, police coordinator for domestic violence Pauline Rangī and Commissioner Maara Tetava have pledged to fight hard for the cause, and PPDVP fully support them. ■ RR