

Jan Logie

Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Justice



Deborah Mackenzie and Ruth Herbert
Co-founders - The Backbone Collective
By email to: info@backbone.org.nz

08 MAR 2018

Tēna korua

Thank you for meeting with me on Monday 5 March to discuss your research and my work as Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

As Under-Secretary, the Minister of Justice has given me responsibility for assisting with the government's engagement with the non-government sector on the design of an integrated and responsive family violence system. In particular, I will lead discussions with providers and other experts – including yourselves - on the Justice-related aspects of the system.

I can assure you that in this role I will work to ensure processes are put in place so the voices of victims are heard. I am aware that the Ministry is also committed to including family violence victims' voices in its work. Its approach is consistent with the Ministry of Social Development's 2012 report, 'Incorporating the Voice of Experience' cited in the Backbone Collective's first report, '*All Eyes on the Family Court*'.

The reports published by the Collective have helped inform the solutions currently under consideration by government. For example, the focus of the review of family violence legislation and the Multi Agency Team's work on developing an integrated and responsive system were both informed by the Collective's reports and submissions.

As you know, the Family Violence Legislation Bill will enable important improvements to the system. These measures are important steps towards increasing the safety and wellbeing of families involved in Family Court proceedings. For example, the new principles underpinning decision-making will include: recognition of the impact of violence on children; consideration of the views of family members; and the need for families to have access to services that will stem the use of violence and increase safety.

The Bill will enable better information sharing, to support improved risk and needs assessment and responses across government and NGOs. Family Court judges will be encouraged to consider whether family violence is an issue in Care of Children proceedings by empowering them to issue protection orders in those proceedings, extending the matters judges must consider when assessing children's safety. Funding has also been provided to the Institute of Judicial Studies to prepare a family violence benchbook for Judges.

The Collective's most recent report, *Seen and Not Heard*, comes at a time when the Ministry is focused on improving the justice response to victims of family violence and sexual violence. This work includes training for all court staff, to build awareness of the impacts of violence and how to work with people who have experienced it.

Consistent with his public comments, I can confirm that the Minister of Justice is scoping a review of the Family Court reforms. That review will provide an important opportunity for the Backbone Collective and its members to comment on the 2014 reforms and to influence the changes that come out of the review.

I have also asked Ministry officials to talk with the Collective about how you would like to input into its programme of work to implement the new legislation.

The work programme includes (but is not limited to):

- the redesign of the Protection Order application form, the process for issuing an order and the system response around it,
- testing a prototype of a perpetrator risk and needs assessment service, and
- providing information about the justice system to victims of family violence and sexual violence, and their whānau.

If you would like to meet with officials, I would be happy to facilitate a meeting with you in Auckland at a mutually convenient time.

In the meantime, please be assured that as this government's work towards an improved family violence and sexual violence system continues, it intends to draw on the research provided by the Backbone Collective, and others, in the design and monitoring of system responses.

I appreciate your important advocacy for families and your willingness to engage with me on these important issues.

Warm regards.

Yours sincerely,



Jan Logie MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Justice (Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence)