

Kids FIRST Whanau Centre: making a difference to women and children's lives

It is well established in research that poverty, abuse and neglect not only create severe emotional and psychological impacts on a child's development, but may also result in devastating health outcomes. Brain research is clear - the brain stem must be calm before learning can begin and predictability is vital for calming the brain stem.

Run by Anglican Action, Kids FIRST Whanau Centre (KFWC) is a place where women take back their life and their children flourish. KFWC develop and support mothers to engage in a plan to create routine, predictability, and a sustainable rhythm to their days. They have introduced meditation and breathing to give mothers the time and tools to create calm in themselves and for their children. KFWC is a 24/7 staffed residence, and the staff are culturally diverse. Mothers and babies stay for six months as this long period of time is seen as an investment in mothers and babies for long term change. The goal of KFWC goal is for mothers and children to leave together, with the mother being able to sustain safe, caring, loving and appropriate parenting for their child.

Karen Cave, Manager for Kids FIRST Whanau Centre says that the work they do leads to healthier communities.

"By placing children at the core of our work we recognise that healthy and sustainable communities are built around child centred parenting" says Karen.

This is a full immersion six month residential programme, which can and does produce change. Women enter the residence with a life time narrative about themselves which may have been shaped by early childhood insecure attachment, abuse, violence, addictive behaviours and a fractured self-image. They come because this is the legacy they are building in their own children which needs to be interrupted and changed.

KFWC is an enormous challenge for the women, their families, their partners, and for the staff who devote themselves on a daily basis to forging new pathways with them. The work takes courage, but a recent resident says that the hard work is worth it.

"For the first few weeks it's going to be hard. There will be things you will learn and it is going to give you time to bond with your baby – that's special. You will learn about yourself and things you never knew. You may or may not make friends here. There's always going to be support when you need it" this past resident says.

Most enter Kid's FIRST whanau centre anxiously, reluctantly, and sometimes aggressively. Fear drives so much of their behaviour, the learned reactions from childhood. It is for this reason that time is given to help mothers and babies settle in with a lot of one on one support.

Karen Cave says that women soak up their learning at KFWC.

"Our point of difference here is that they (the women and children) get to integrate what they learn fully into their daily life with support" says Karen.

KFWC are currently undertaking the process of sourcing private/corporate funding for mothers and infants for whom CYF funding may not be available but who still have a need to come into residence for six months. Any interested parties should contact Karen Cave.

To find out more about the Kids FIRST Whanau Centre, contact Karen Cave by email
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