

MEDIA RELEASE

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RAW has 80 candles on its birthday cake

For the last eight years, Annah Stretton (a social entrepreneur) and her sister Rebecca Skilton (a mental health practitioner) have worked in the New Zealand women’s prisons building up trust, credibility and hope with high and complex wāhine offenders.

Operating through the innovative reintegration charity that they founded in 2014, RAW (Reclaim Another Woman), their unwavering objective has been to offer a breakthrough and lifelong rehabilitation opportunity to any wahine committed to lifestyle change.

In May 2022, 80 wāhine (or around 18% of today’s female prison population) will have taken up the opportunity to put their trust in two complete strangers, promising a highly personalised rehabilitation plan, in the hope of breaking the criminal cycles of disadvantage for their tamariki and mokopuna.

Over the course of eight years, the RAW Reintegration Model has evolved as Annah and Rebecca’s understanding, research and experience with a group of wāhine who have faced extreme social disadvantage and strong intergenerational influence have matured. Their focus, however, remains steadfastly on the social determinants of health (housing, employment, health and education) to ensure wāhine restore their tino rangatiratanga (self-determination and mana) through inclusion and purpose.

“At the outset, we foolishly thought that we would be inundated with takers if we offered a wrap-around reintegration model that included accommodation, education, and employment opportunities. We couldn’t have been more naïve.”

“Today, we know better. Unless willingly interrupted through models they both trust in, and which recognise and accommodate the journey of trauma, wāhine offenders are more likely to continue on a socially destructive intergenerational criminal pathway, not only for themselves but also by way of setting higher and higher benchmarks for their tamariki and mokopuna to strive for.”

When it comes to looking at some of the root causes of this destructive cycle, RAW has a view too.

“Little or no exposure to education, debilitating health issues, substandard housing and an absolute distrust of all things Pakeha are key drivers in this intergenerational cycle of poverty, violence, crime, and disadvantage that the RAW Model has sought to disrupt for the wāhine they support.”

The road ahead

Eight years on, and on the back of the Government announcing more funding for wāhine rehabilitation programmes inside and outside the wire, RAW remains resolute that societal understanding and inclusion, trust, education and time are the circuit breakers.

Healthy lifestyles, where basic survival needs are met, along with more formal education opportunities, brings understanding and purpose to a lifetime of trauma and disadvantage. Stabilising the core then opens the door to new lifestyle choices for the wāhine and their whānau.

“Once living with stability and support, RAW wāhine have gone on to select and support attendance at schools that will assist tamariki with their educational and learning challenges. These tamariki ultimately become the circuit breakers of whānau social disadvantage as they educate and advance the family’s coping strategies. Supporting Mums to break the criminal cycle just makes sense on so many levels.” says Annah.

Committed for the long haul

While no two rehabilitation pathways or durations are the same, the RAW Model acknowledges this complexity through their sustained lifelong commitment to each RAW wahine.

“One thing that makes RAW truly unique is that we are a model for life. A lifetime of trauma can’t be resolved through some form of rehabilitation short course. It’s about small purposeful gains over time that build up the momentum and the belief required to disrupt a lifetime of disadvantage.”

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About RAW

The RAW Charity is a social impact superstar set up by Annah Stretton in 2014 to help female offenders successfully transition from a life of crime to a life of promise through education, employment and intensive support and mentoring.

Working alongside her sister Rebecca, who has had 25 years working in mental health, The RAW Programme has been hailed by the New Zealand Department of Corrections as a breakthrough rehabilitation model with an unparalleled record of success.

To find out more about how RAW is changing women's lives visit **www.raw.org.nz**.