

Safe@home Evaluation

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Summary

Overview of safe@home

Safe@home is a service provided by shine*,¹ an Auckland NGO that works with victims of family violence. The service is delivered to women and children identified by shine* and Avondale police as being at high risk from domestic violence. Safe@home makes victims' homes safer from attack by whatever security work or devices are deemed necessary, including locks, stronger doors, alarms and escape plans. It enables them to stay in their own homes, as an alternative to the temporary safe haven of a Women's Refuge. This minimises disruption to their lives and the lives of their children, and avoids the cost of permanent relocation.

Shine* received funds to establish the project in May 2008 from the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) through its service arm Family and Community Services (FACS). Shine* enrolled the first clients to the service in November 2008. Project development was supported by a Steering Group with representatives from participating government agencies, shine*, the building firm and alarm provider. The criteria for victims of domestic violence to be eligible for the service were that they:

- were at high risk of further harm from the offender
- did not want the offender in their home
- could obtain landlord consent (if relevant).

Overview of the evaluation

This was a formative evaluation designed to collect and analyse information to answer the following questions about the implementation of the service:

- Did the project meet its delivery targets, and if not why not?
- Were the homes safety audited, and what did the safety audits find?
- What were the changes made to the houses, and what equipment was provided?
- Was there evidence that victims were safer and/or felt safer as a result of the intervention?

In addition we asked key informants: "What worked well and why?" and "What did not work well, and why?"

The evaluation was not an outcomes or impact evaluation but drew on information collected from 50 victims who were referred for the service up to June 2009. This allowed for a minimum three-month follow-up period. The information was self reported information about their perceived safety and wellbeing and was collected by shine* advocates at the time victims entered the service and again after the security upgrade was complete. No independent data was sourced and victims were not interviewed for the purposes of the evaluation.

¹ Shine* (Safer Homes in New Zealand Everyday) was formerly named Preventing Violence in the Home. The name change occurred during the time of the project.

Data sources used to answer the questions included:

- NZ Police domestic violence database records of police call-outs.
- shine* client database and client information sheets²
- interviews with informants (shine* staff and representatives of agencies on the steering group).

Key findings

Project success

Project participants and informants were unconditionally positive about the project and its outcomes. Informants who had direct contact with the women after the intervention all reported greater impact from the project than they expected.

It's a fabulous, fabulous project. (NZ Police)

My house is like Fort Knox and I rarely slept until this angel came along and secured my home. (safe@home participant)

Informants reported downstream benefits to participant agencies including improved communication and understanding between agencies, higher community trust in agencies, and better agency access to high-need clients.

Are victims safer and/or do they feel safer as a result of the intervention?

According to the victims' self-assessments, their wellbeing improved significantly after the safe@home intervention. On average, victims' fear of harm scores before the intervention were 6.23 (where 7 = extremely fearful and 0 = unconcerned), compared with an average score of 2.70 after the intervention.

Before the intervention nearly all victims reported high anxiety and stress and other symptoms of distress caused by domestic violence. After the intervention, victims reported reduced anxiety and improved sleeping, confidence, stability and concentration. Victims also reported improvements in their children's wellbeing after the intervention, including reduced fear, and improved sleeping, behaviour and performance at school.

Did the project meet the delivery targets?

Informants agreed that safe@home reached the intended target group, ie victims at the highest risk from repeat domestic violence offenders. Delivering the service to the targeted individuals was reported as one of the most valued success factors for the project, because it was so difficult to create safety for this group.

The delivery targets in the original contract were based on an estimate of likely eligible clients in the project area. As the project rolled out, the numbers of eligible clients proved to be lower than estimated and the required service more intense. Victims needed to be ready to deny the offenders entry to their homes. The cost per client (and family) was higher than originally expected and the number of clients who received the service was fewer.

² Victims were not interviewed by the evaluator, but the shine* project coordinator collected client responses to the project on client information sheets.

Were the homes safety-audited, and what did the safety audits find?

Safety audits were carried out on all properties of the clients participating in the project. Informants commented on the speed with which the intervention could be initiated. Where there was no difficulty contacting the victim, the first visit by the safe@home project coordinator could take place within 24 hours. The project coordinator spent several hours with the client conducting the assessment for the project and the safety audit.

Safety audits established the need for window and door security stays, security lights, and in some cases, door replacements. Some houses had been extensively damaged by the offender and in many cases could not be secured until the upgrades had taken place.

Safety upgrades

The various components of the project, which included monitored personal alarms, security upgrades, phones, and the offer of police drive-bys, were not all required in every case. Houses received changes to windows and doors, and in some cases security lights were installed. The average cost of the security upgrade per house was \$1,331. The highest cost was \$3,000, with replacement doors being the most costly single item required. The most common improvements to security involved fitting window stays and door restrictors. Twenty-eight of the victims were provided with a monitored personal alarm.

Other benefits of the project

Informants interviewed for the project identified a number of benefits of the programme that were indicative of potential cost savings. These included likely reduction in damage to the homes (some of which were Housing New Zealand homes), improvements in wellbeing and fewer injuries, fewer relocation grants and advances from Work and Income, fewer fire starts and associated call-outs, efficiencies in client service for shine*, and less likelihood of children being taken into Child Youth and Family (CYF) care. The Police representative guessed that the project may have saved three or four lives (also avoiding associated homicide investigations and prosecutions). Data on these potential savings were not systematically collected, but informant observations in their various areas of expertise suggest that the costs of the intervention are probably offset by savings in other areas.

What worked well?

Informants identified the following success factors for the project:

- for the steering group:
 - having the right membership and leadership on the steering group
 - excellent communication between steering group members
 - strong relationships established between agencies on the steering group
- for the referral and assessment processes:
 - the risk assessment across agencies worked well to identify the 4–5% of highest-risk victims
 - referral processes led to timely delivery of the intervention
- the skill and experience of the project coordinator, particularly in her role as an effective communicator with the steering group and in assessing client need.

Issues that emerged during the project (and were successfully addressed) included the need for:

- alignment between the project boundaries for project delivery and the different geographical boundaries of CYF, NZ Police and shine*
- a Memorandum of Understanding between the agencies.

Background

This report presents the findings and conclusions of the evaluation of the safe@home project. Safe@home is a service provided by shine* to women and children identified by shine* and Avondale police as being at high risk from domestic violence. In addition to the range of professional support services and referrals shine* provides to the victims of domestic violence, safe@home provides:

- a safety audit of the victim's home by the project coordinator
- a security upgrade of the house where necessary
- monitored personal alarms where appropriate
- cell phones (for dialling 111) for household members where needed.

The New Zealand Fire Service arranges a visit after the security upgrade to carry out a fire safety check, check or install smoke detectors, and develop an escape plan for the homes.

Shine* received funds to establish the project from MSD in May 2008, and enrolled the first clients to the service in November 2008. Project development was supported by a Steering Group with representatives of participant agencies, including the building firm and alarm provider employed in upgrades. This evaluation reports on the implementation of the project, and the experiences of the first 50 clients of the service.

The safe@home project was developed to provide victims of domestic violence who remained at high risk from repeated violence with support to enable them to stay in their own homes. Women attempting to leave violent partners often have difficulty in escaping repeat (and sometimes escalating) violence. Women's Refuge and other services provide victims with alternative accommodation, offering temporary safe havens. The victims then either return home, or must find new accommodation with the associated costs and disruptions to their lives and the lives of their children. Safe@home aimed to solve this problem by increasing the safety and confidence of domestic violence victims, to enable them to remain in their own homes.

The safe@home project was designed by shine*, an Auckland NGO, and funded by FACS. The project is modelled on a UK project which reduced the repeat victimisation of women who were at high risk of repeat victimisation by their violent ex-partners. The initiative provided practical resources to participants to increase the security and stability of their homes and lives. This was the first time such an initiative had been carried out in New Zealand, and therefore was a "concept test".

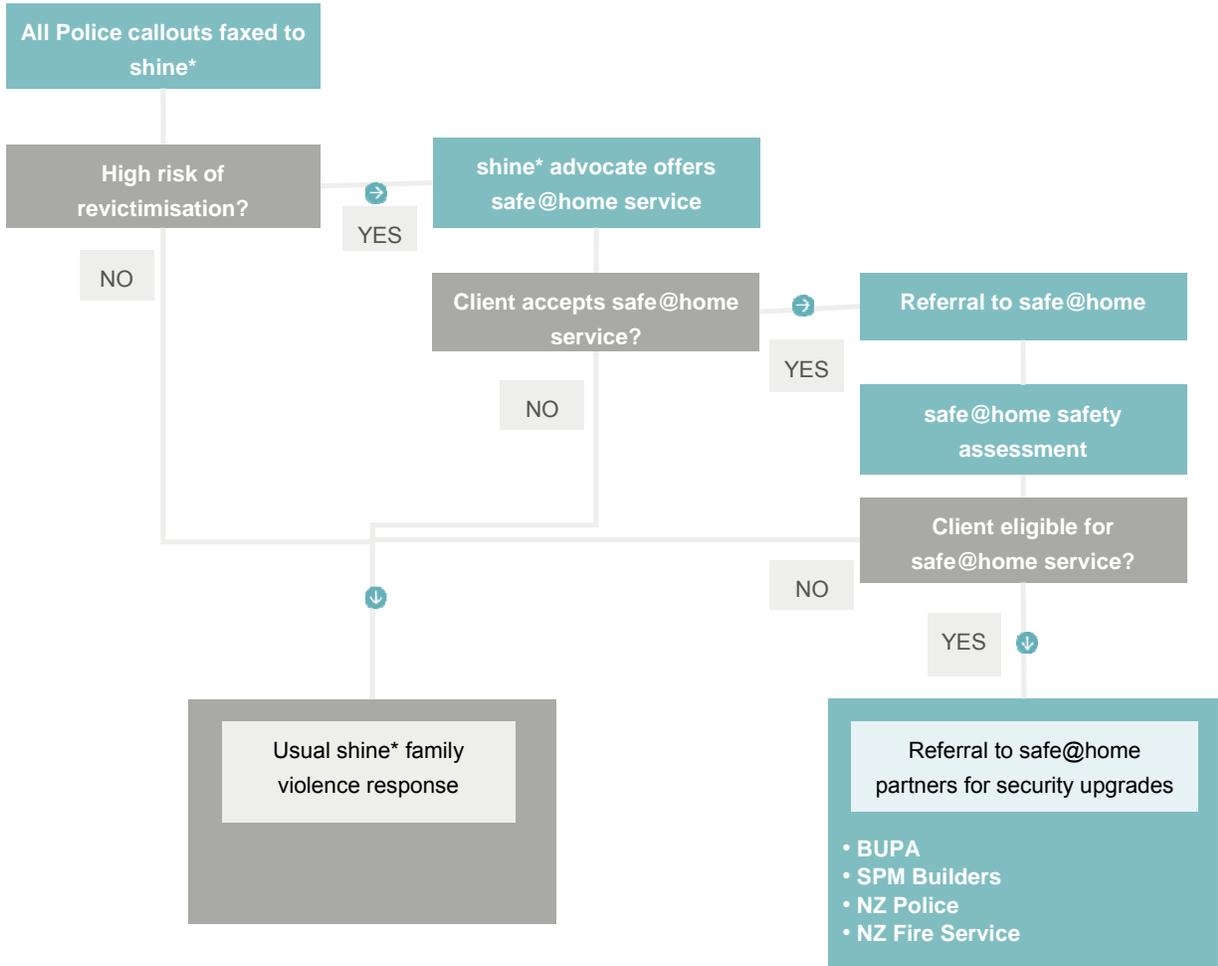
The long-term goals of the safe@home project were to:

- reduce participants' fear of continuing violence and allow them to feel confident in their homes
- increase stability for adults and children who had experienced domestic violence by providing security systems and resources so they were able to stay in their own homes and school(s) and continue to maintain contact with family, friends and support networks
- decrease the "spiral to poverty" for adults and children who had experienced domestic violence.

The criteria for service entry were victims of domestic violence who:

- were at high risk of further harm from the offender
- did not want the offender in their home
- could obtain landlord consent (if relevant).

Safe@home project process flow-chart



Evaluation findings

Demand for the project

To get a rough estimate of demand for safe@home, a sample of referrals to shine* was examined for eligibility for the programme. The shine* database recorded all police callouts and clients referred from other sources. Not all clients had a risk assessment score, but where risk information was available they were classified as high, medium or low. An analysis of shine* referrals received in June and August showed that 53 out of 191 referrals (over one-quarter) were classified as high risk, and of the 53, ten entered the safe@home programme. The high-risk cases included clients from the east of Auckland who were outside the geographical boundaries set for the project. Assuming that no more than half of the clients referred were from the Eastern Auckland district, then 20–50% of high-risk clients would have been eligible according to the safe@home criteria.

Description of clients up to June 2009

Fifty victims were accepted into the project in the first 11 months of safe@home's operation. In 45 cases the offender was their ex-partner. In four cases the offender was another family member (adult child of the victim, or the victim's parent), and in the remaining case the offender was an ex-boarder of the victim.

Table 1. Number and ages of victims and children in the safe@home project

AGE OF VICTIMS	16–25 yrs	26–35 yrs	36–45 yrs	46–55 yrs	56–65 yrs
Number of clients	7	17	17	8	1
AGE OF CHILDREN	Under 2 yrs	2–4 yrs	5–9 yrs	10–14 yrs	15–17 yrs
Number of children	9	17	25	27	8

There were 86 children under the age of 18 living in the homes involved in the project. Only eight homes had no children living in them. The majority of the children (60 per cent) were school aged, and thus likely to experience disruption if they needed to move from their home and change schools to escape family violence.

Most safe@home clients were beneficiaries (see Table 2). There was some evidence that safe@home had the potential to change victims' ability to become work-ready. Many of the women reported that they were afraid to leave their homes (18 out of 30 client information sheets) and for some the harassment by the offender included threats to work-mates or friends.

Table 2. Employment status of safe@home clients

EMPLOYMENT STATUS	Beneficiary	Full-time	Part-time	Student	Self-employed
Number of clients	30	12	4	4	1

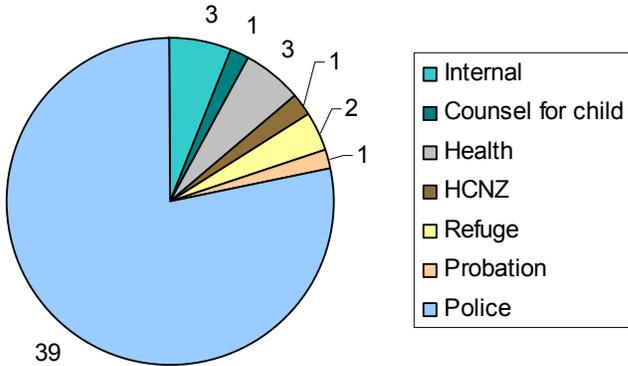
Referrals to safe@home

For victims within the designated geographical boundary of the project, the criterion for referral to safe@home was a high risk score (shine* score of 10 and above). Shine* advocates, NZ Police and the project coordinator all agreed on the appropriateness of this criterion.

Figure 1 shows that most of the referrals to the safe@home project came from police call-outs to domestic violence incidents. Details of all such police call-outs in the project area were notified to

shine* and it was from these referrals that the majority of referrals to safe@home were taken. Shine* advocates did the initial filtering, and at a later stage a senior advocate reviewed all cases to ensure that no suitable referrals were missed.

Figure 1 Source of referrals to safe@home



The police family violence coordinator commented that he was confident in identifying cases for referral and found the referral criteria clear – all cases he referred had been accepted for the project. Shine* advocates commented that it had become clearer as the project developed which clients were likely to be appropriate for safe@home. These views were supported by the decrease in the proportion of ineligible clients referred to safe@home over time (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Monthly referrals to safe@home

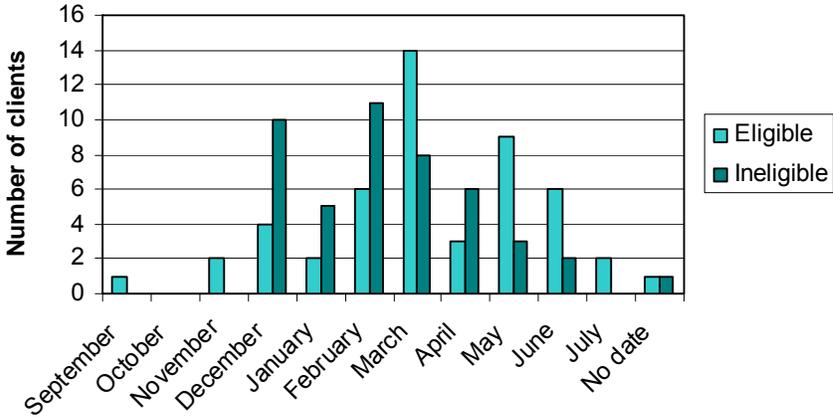
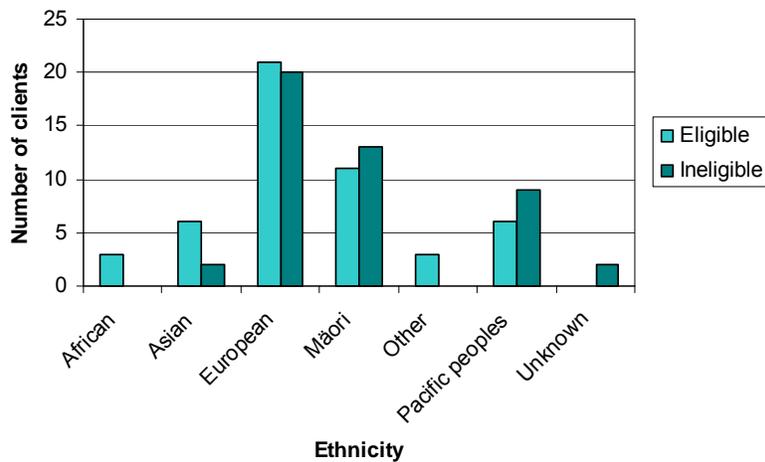


Figure 3 shows the ethnicity of the women who were accepted for safe@home and those who declined, or were ineligible for the service. Most women were Pakeha, followed by Māori and Pacific people.

Figure 3 Ethnicity of eligible and ineligible clients



The most common reason for a victim being ineligible for safe@home (nearly half of ineligible referrals) was continued association with the offender (see Table 3). The project coordinator commented that this was the hardest factor to assess. There were straightforward cases where the victims had protection orders in place and used them, but where it was the first time the victim or their neighbour called the police, then the assessment was more difficult.

Table 3. Reasons for decline/ineligibility for safe@home project

REASON FOR DECLINE	Number of clients
Associating with offender	20
Victim declined service	6
Property unsuitable	3
Safety risk too great	0
No landlord consent	0
Unable to be contacted	10
Low safety concerns	3
Victim to refuge	1
Moving out of area	2
Other	1

Informants confirmed that the project did not work for those victims who were ambivalent or not yet ready to stop contact with the offender. Informants commented that the security might well be helpful further down the track when victims were prepared to take this final step to protect themselves and their children.

Although one informant commented that property tenure might be an issue for safe@home, the administrative data showed no instances where this was given as the reason for ineligibility. However there were three properties that were assessed as unsuitable for safe@home. Informants commented that the project could be difficult to implement in inner city apartments.

Several informants commented on the geographical boundary and the frustration of having victims who needed the service but were just outside the boundary area. There were also two cases where victims were declined because they were moving out of the project area.

The project coordinator was cautious about accepting clients with severe mental illness, or drug and alcohol issues because they might misuse the alarms and consequently discredit the project. Ten women were unable to be contacted, possibly because they did not have landlines or did not check cell-phone messages due to lack of funds. Safe@home was also unable to help victims who were transient.

Assessing victims' risk

Three risk assessments were undertaken as part of the safe@home programme:

- police risk and lethality assessment of clients referred from the police call-out process
- shine* risk assessment
- victims' self-assessment of their fear of harm both before and after the intervention (the self-assessment data is discussed below in the section on impacts on victims).

The police and shine* assessments included a consideration of the history of offending, and were not expected to change significantly before and after the intervention – rather they were an indicator for targeting the intervention to victims at highest risk. Risk assessments depended on the information available at the time, and were not static. They were a guide only, and both the police and shine* emphasised the importance of expert judgement in assessing danger and risk.

Police assessments were available for fewer than half of the participating clients. Police scores were categorised as no or low risk, moderate risk, and high or extremely high. Ten out of the 19 clients for whom police scores were available scored in the high or extremely high category.

There was a shine* risk assessment for nearly all of the clients. Shine* scores were categorised as variable, elevated, high or extreme danger. All except one client was assessed as high or in the extreme danger category.

Police call-out data and victim safety

The police administrative dataset for the project recorded call-out incidents for 29 of the 50 offenders. For 17 of the 29, multiple incidents were recorded before the intervention – in one case up to 30 previous incidents. There were incidents recorded after referral to safe@home in only 5 cases, and in only one case was there more than one incident recorded. While there was no suitable comparison group available for this study, it is worth noting that several of the ineligible clients continued to have multiple incidents recorded in the follow-up period.

Impact on victims

Thirty of the 50 victims in the study completed client information sheets before and after the security upgrade/alarm provision.³ This included a measure of self-rated fear of harm.

³ Fifty clients completed a self-assessment of their fear of harm before the safe@home intervention. Only thirty completed both the before and after self-assessments. The main reason for not completing the post-intervention self-assessment was that clients were unable to be contacted; in two cases, the offender had returned to the home; and three clients had moved house (two of those had been provided with a personal alarm only).

Victims were asked the following question:

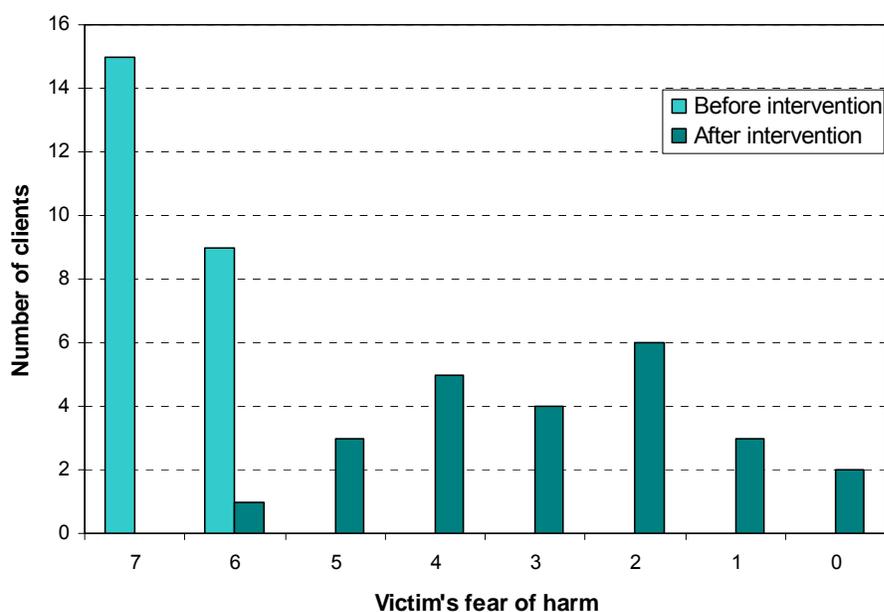
On a scale of 1 to 7 where would you rate your current fear of risk of harm from the offender?

A score of zero meant they were unconcerned about being harmed, and seven meant extreme fear of harm. There was a dramatic drop in victims' fear of harm scores following the safety upgrade. The average fear of harm score before the safety upgrade was 6.23. Following the safety upgrade, the average score was 2.70.

Most (22) victims scored 6 or 7 on the fear of harm scale before the intervention. Their fears included abduction of their children, property damage, or being assaulted, raped or killed themselves.

Figure 4 illustrates the change in self-assessment for these most-frightened clients. They described the change in their state of mind in terms of lack of worry and having the confidence to leave their house.

Figure 4 Change in fear of harm score after intervention (clients who scored 6 or 7 before)



Anxiety, stress and other impacts

Client information sheets showed dramatic improvements in the wellbeing of victims after the intervention. Nearly all victims reported relief from anxiety and stress. Victims also mentioned other impacts, such as shame and guilt, depression, poor concentration, low confidence, alcohol over-use, suicidality, feeling “crazy” or “ugly”, physical ill-health and loss of trust.

Child safety after the intervention

Both the non-offending adults in the households and informants believed that children were safer after the intervention.

This is helping the women keep the children safe from the offender. (Interview: CYF)

The client information sheets recorded comments on the wellbeing of the children that referred to such issues as:

- witnessing assaults
- fear of the perpetrator – “He’s not going to hit you with the frypan is he?”
- nightmares, difficulty sleeping and bedwetting
- aggressive behaviour (hitting, scratching or biting)
- not wanting to go to school.

Of the 30 clients for whom post-intervention self-assessments were available, 25 reported on the wellbeing of their children. Before the intervention, 20 of the 25 reported that their children were scared of the offender and/or showed symptoms of distress from the violence.⁴ Twelve of them reported improvements in their children’s wellbeing after the intervention including:

- improvements in sleeping – “sleep all night – less nightmares”
- no longer hitting
- not so scared, more relaxed
- doing well at school.

Caregivers were aware that some of these improvements for their children were flow-on effects from improvements in their own wellbeing.

Their self-esteem is really low because of constant intimidation so once they get into the project ... Their self-esteem rises because their safety has gone up ... and when they are OK they can look after their children. (Interview: shine*)

Non-safety benefits from the intervention

The project coordinator reported that about one-third of the women had thought of relocating. Intent to move was not recorded on early client information sheets, but was recorded on later sheets. Fourteen out of 30 reported that they had moved recently or were thinking of moving to escape the violence before the intervention.

Moving house and neighbourhood had many downstream implications for victims and their children, including loss of neighbourhood connections and the need to find new services in new areas. If it was necessary to change schools, this could disrupt children’s learning and peer relationships. Some women needed to apply for advances on their benefit and relocations grants to cover the cost of moving.

Fire safety after the intervention

The safe@home project also facilitated contact with the fire service to install smoke alarms and develop individualised escape plans that took account of the new home security. Many of the clients came from population groups that, according to fire service statistics, had higher risk of fire starts. Some of the offenders had threatened, attempted or carried out arson attacks on the victims.

⁴ Of the five who did not report distress or fear on the part of their children, two reported that their babies were relaxed and happy. For the remaining three the children were either having supervised access only, did not remember the offender, or still had a positive relationship with the offender.

Who does the project work for?

Victims

The factor most commonly identified by informants when discussing who safe@home worked for was the victim's readiness to close the door to the offender. Almost all of the women who benefited from the project had protection orders or were applying for them at the time of entry to the project.⁵ Where the women had long-term protection orders, the offenders continued to harass them. Thus safe@home gave victims who already made the decision to try and escape violence in the home another tool to protect themselves and provided them with their first freedom and experience of feeling safe in their own homes. The project also worked well for women considering leaving – one more tool that might tip the balance:

So they are doing their lists in their heads why should I leave or why should I kick him out ... this is just another thing that will tip the scales to if I had a safer home and the protection order, and the alarm then he's not going to get in ... and that tips the balance.
(Interview: shine*)

Costs and benefits

The direct costs to shine* included the costs of the coordinator's salary, and the costs of supporting her in her role (supervision and infrastructure). The costs per client for the intervention itself varied according to the circumstances. The size, location and existing security of the dwelling, and the methods used by offenders to gain entry determined the cost of the security upgrade itself. Costs over this time period covered a range of work from alarms only, through provision of new locks, door restrictors and window stays, to extensive changes including security lights and the replacement of glass doors with reinforced doors. The average cost of the security upgrade per house was \$1,331. The highest cost was \$3,000, with replacement doors being the most costly single item required. The most commonly needed alterations involved fitting window stays and door restrictors. Other items provided as needed included deadlocks, drop bolts, peep-holes and security lights. Twenty-eight of the women were provided with monitored alarms.

For the other agencies participating in the project the only additional costs to their own business costs were the costs of membership in the steering group. Each agency incurred service provision costs (for example the costs of the fire safety assessment and education borne by the NZ Fire Service) but these were normal business costs for the agencies concerned. All agencies were able to list direct benefits of participation in addition to the improvements in the lives of their clients.

Table 4 lists benefits from the project identified from interviews and client information sheets. They have not been formally quantified, as there was not sufficient accurate data to realistically quantify savings from each area identified. Nevertheless, the potential savings from these areas when aggregated was likely to more than cover the cost of the intervention.

⁵ Ten women did not have protection orders at the time of referral to the project – four were applying for them, and one had a parenting order, but no protection order.

Table 4. Potential cost savings areas identified by informants / client information

AGENCY	Impacts that could lead to savings	Evidence for impacts
Shine*	Less time needed to ensure the safety for each client, and advocates therefore able to work with higher numbers of clients	Advocates said safe@home clients required less of their time and therefore they were able to see more high risk clients in the time they had available
HNZ	Reduction in damage to houses, less rent arrears	Reported by advocate and HNZ steering group member
NZ Police	May have saved three or four lives	Police informant
W&I	Fewer relocation grants and advances	Number of victims on W&I benefits reporting that they were thinking of moving
	Less social isolation and fear leading to more work-readiness	Inferred from client report
Health	Improvements in sleep and wellbeing, reduction in injuries	Client reports of dramatic changes to sleeping and other wellbeing indicators
CYF	Children less likely to need CYF referral, and less likely to be taken into care	Informant interviews
NZ Fire Service	Cost of call-outs and fire starts	No direct evidence, but the project allowed fire-safety education and smoke alarms to reach high-risk groups identified by the fire service

Project processes: steering group

What went well?

The Steering Group for the project had representatives from shine*, NZ Police, HNZC, CYF, FACS, the New Zealand Fire Service, Work and Income, and the firms contracted to provide monitored alarms and security upgrades (BUPA and SPM Builders).

All steering group members interviewed gave positive endorsement of their steering group experience. Descriptions included: “an incredible experience” “a close-knit team” and “incredible good will”. Specific strengths identified included:

- relationships
 - there were pre-existing good relationships – this has made them better
 - one-on-one relationships – can pick up the phone to each other
 - enormous good will – members passionate about the project
- excellent communication, including good information at the beginning
- experience
 - broad spectrum of experience
 - relative seniority of agency representatives (allowed for fast decision-making and issue resolution)
- commitment
 - being on board straight away
 - everyone wanting to make a difference
 - regular meetings allowing for fast resolution of any issues.

Being involved and seeing the impact and role that different organisations are playing to bring it together is fantastic. Everyone involved is bouncing ideas off each other. (Interview: BUPA)

Informants commented that the project widened the net of agencies committed to the prevention of violence within families by including more than agencies whose core business is family violence. One informant suggested that the net could be widened even further if the project continued.

Another informant commented on spin-offs from the pilot at a quite senior level in the agencies that helps them work well together.

It has brought all the agencies together in a really positive way ... There's a real buzz at the steering committee group that we are doing something great. (Interview: Police)

The project coordinator's role establishing and driving the steering group was acknowledged by several informants. Two examples given were her provision of excellent information at the beginning and her reporting of the project's success, which included stories to make it real. A police informant commented that the joined up agencies sent powerful messages to the offenders:

"We are not going to tolerate this. That they are on our radar and we are not going to let this go".

What did not go well?

Most informants found it difficult to think of problems with the project, and some could offer no examples of things that had not gone well. Other informants focused on two issues that took some time and energy to resolve:

- determining the project boundaries for project delivery – CYF, NZ Police and shine* all had different geographical boundaries
- finalising the Memorandum of Understanding between the agencies.

One informant also commented on the issue of identifying funding sources at the beginning for the project. She suggested that a cross-departmental funding pool would help where projects had the potential to benefit more than one government agency.

Informants also mentioned that at the beginning as well as the geographical boundaries, there was the need for some ground work to be done so that shine* and the government agencies understood each other and the boundaries of their involvement with the project.

It was a steep learning curve for all of us, but for a team that was first up, I think we did particularly well. (Interview: Police)

Another informant commented that there was a risk of getting bogged down in paper-work at the beginning – however others rated the development of forms and processes, and the memorandum of understanding as success factors.

Project processes: implementation

What went well

The following factors were identified by informants as contributing to the successful implementation of the project:

- excellent communication by the shine* project coordinator to members of the steering group. **The communication skills of the girls doing it. (Interview: SPM – builders)**
- the steering committee came on board straight away and brought together a wider range of agencies than those attending Family Violence Inter-agency Response System (FVIARS) meetings. **The getting together of all the agencies that decided to put their hands up was the best part of the implementation.**
- seniority of steering group members – senior staff of agencies (including the property maintenance firm) were able to set up good processes
- meeting regularly meant participants were kept up-to-date with accurate information.

Steering committee members were able to make sure that the sequencing of the project processes worked effectively. This included a visit to the CYF national call centre (organised by a steering committee member) so that the steering committee had a clear understanding of pre-existing processes.

The project coordinator's approach was mentioned by several informants as a key success factor:

She really did invent the wheel, she did all the forms; ... she had to think "who will I ring to be on the steering committee"; she had to forge relationships with all those people, none of whom she had met before. (Interview: shine* advocate).

What did not go well

Informants were asked what had not gone well, or needed improvement. Some commented on a lack of clarity at the beginning of the project. The time taken for implementation was longer than expected, but not unsurprising when the project development requirements were considered.

In terms of implementation it took a long time to get off the ground. People underestimated how difficult it would be. (Interview: CYF)

Informants specifically raised the difficulties with identifying a personal alarm provider as part of the implementation delay. How to identify appropriate firms for delivery of the security upgrades and monitored alarms was not immediately self-evident at the beginning of the project, and therefore it took time to bring both companies on board.

The lack of a map showing clear geographical boundaries for the project also contributed to delays – it took three months to get a map of the area, because such a map did not exist, but had to be constructed using CYF software and then hand-drawn on a physical map. Clear project boundaries for partner agencies should be determined if the project is established in other areas.

One informant commented that having one person on their own to implement the project was a problem at the beginning – that the steep learning curve was a down-side at the beginning, but now meant that the coordinator would be able to implement the project anywhere (and someone else commented that shine* would be able to write a project manual for the project). This could be improved by the provision of more support for the project manager at the beginning of the project.

Project processes: project and client management

What went well

Informants agreed that safe@home got the risk assessment right. The project was seen as having successfully targeted the top 4–5% of high-risk victims.

We have targeted those high-risk victims ... who are at the most risk in terms of serious harm or death ... I have never seen a project where we've targeted that group, and I believe tremendously well. (Interview: NZ Police)

Many of the informants gave examples of where they thought the client management processes established for the project had positive outcomes both for the victims receiving the service and for the agencies participating in the project. Unexpected positive outcomes included the strong relationships established between agencies on the steering group. Informants' identification of success factors were specific to their personal experience of the project, but the factors were often confirmed by other observers and constituted transferrable learning for project implementation in other areas. The factors included:

- the speed with which the intervention was delivered
- the quality of the SPM builders' staff who were "hand-picked for their sensitivity and personality" by the business general manager
- the process for referring victims for the security upgrades and to the fire service
- the relationships between the agencies: coordination of services and sharing risk assessment between agencies.

Referral processes to both the project and then on to the different components were reported to be getting more and more streamlined. Getting the forms and processes set up well at the beginning was reported as a success factor. Referrals worked particularly well for the advocates, because they could discuss cases with the coordinator prior to making the referral.

The builders, alarm providers and fire service all said referral processes were clear and straightforward, and this contributed to the speed of delivery of the service. BUPA, the personal alarm provider, commented that they were able to send out the alarm the day they got the request. They had modified personal alarms ready to go so that they could be provided within 24 hours.

What did not go well

Both the fire service and the project coordinator reported that in the final fire-safety intervention it was sometimes difficult for the project coordinator to make speedy contact with the fire service. The fire service also sometimes experienced difficulty in making contact with the clients to complete the fire safety inspection, and provide fire safety information, smoke alarms and safety plans for the family. This was often the result of victims not having landlines, and not collecting or answering messages on cell phones because of lack of credit. In some cases shine* provided victims with cell phones with a little credit to solve the problem.

At the beginning of the project the identification of clients for referral to safe@home was not always straightforward. For the first few months of the project the flow of referrals was slow. This was resolved by delegating an experienced advocate to do a review of all police call-out referrals to shine* and contact any apparently eligible victims who might benefit from safe@home. This process increased the referral flow, and as the benefits of the project became clear, and the project more widely known, the flow of referrals increased to approximately 12 per month.

Other processes

Shine* undertook three-monthly reviews of monitored alarm users to determine whether the alarms were still needed. Some victims were happy to give them up because the offender was no longer harassing them. Others, even if the offender had not tried to access the house, still considered the alarm their safety. There were a very few cases where the need for the alarm was likely to be long term because of extreme risk from the offender.

Barriers and improvements

Most informants could not identify barriers to the service. One informant commented, when asked about barriers or difficulties, "Only the geography for those that haven't made it in". Another commented that he had expected there would be more barriers, but the women were so thankful for the service and there had really been no barriers. The most common suggestion for improvement was more money to roll the project out to a wider area. However there were a number of other suggestions made as well:

- more money so that a more thorough job could be done of the security upgrade (depending on the way in which the offender attempted access)

- publicity at the beginning, perhaps a project launch, so that the project was more widely known within the target community
- a cross-departmental (government) funding pool for projects like this where a number of different departments benefit
- expanding to the whole Auckland central police district so that the Police East family violence coordinator could also make referrals.

It was suggested that earlier contact with the fire service would not only address the problems associated with later contact, but also identify further improvements that could be made as part of the security upgrade. Another suggested improvement was to strengthen processes for engaging with staff within the partner organisations. Presentations within the agencies to members who were likely to need engagement (eg tenancy managers of HNZ) could improve the engagement of such staff with the project.

To keep the referral processes running smoothly, the agency or business coordinator needed to be someone whose role meant that they were easily contactable. SPM builders transferred the coordination role from their business general manager to someone in the office in order to ensure a fast response. The fire-service link person was not always available or contactable and this could slow processes.

Another suggested improvement was to work with neighbourhood support groups so that victims' neighbours would know to call for help straight away – although privacy issues would need to be addressed.

Benefits to member organisations

Informants were asked if and how the service benefited the participating organisations and all those interviewed described benefits to their and other agencies.

Shine*

Safe@home significantly changed shine* advocates' work roles, which were to intervene to create safety for the victim and her children. Before safe@home the advocate needed to support the woman to take action to make herself and her family safe and secure, and one advocate described feeling as if she was harassing the woman. Also, there was a struggle to find funding even to help her change the locks. Safe@home offered more effective security without demanding that the victim take action. Without safe@home,

Sometimes we had to find them a motel because they were not safe or apply to the relief fund for new locks so there was a lot more paper work.

(Note that there was still a lot of paper work for the project coordinator.) Because it took a shorter time to work with the woman, advocates were able to see more high-risk women within their working hours. Advocates commented that only rarely did they hear back from the women with further needs for support. In summary, **"It reduces the struggle to keep them safe"**.

New Zealand Fire Service

The benefits reported by the New Zealand Fire Service were that the programme allowed them access to their key target audiences for fire safety education. The steering group member commented that fire safety education was easy if you could get the right people, and safe@home allowed them to get a foot in the door with those very people.

It was amazingly easy to commit so much to it. It fell right into our basket of target groups that have a lot of fire starts in terms of our statistics – rental is a biggy, Māori and Pacific and immigrants ... Brilliant to get to them ... And a lot have children involved. (Interview: NZ Fire Service)

They were confident that this targeting of fire safety information (which reached not only the victims, but took age-appropriate information along for the children) had an impact on fire safety knowledge and understanding, although it would be difficult to quantify any reduction in fire-starts from this improved knowledge.

I think it has made a huge difference from our point of view that they have far greater fire safety knowledge and understanding than they did have beforehand ... and particularly for the women from outside of New Zealand. (Interview: NZ Fire Service)

One direct benefit of the intervention was the provision and installation of smoke alarms in the houses, and the customised fire escape plan provided for the secured homes.

If we go into homes that have never had smoke alarms then that is a huge benefit, a massive benefit. (Interview: NZ Fire Service)

Child, Youth and Family (CYF)

By helping non-offending parents to keep their children safe, the safe@home intervention decreased the likelihood of the need for CYF intervention and having some of the children consequently ending up in care.

I anticipated a lot of referrals, and that hasn't happened – and I think these are the high-risk cases we might have ended up removing the children because the mother couldn't keep the children safe. (Interview: CYF)

I think it has stopped children ending up on our books. There have been some that were new to us but nowhere near the number we thought. (Interview: CYF)

Without safe@home the women may have needed to go to refuge and then if they had difficulty finding alternative accommodation may have returned to the offender. Even when removal of the children was not required, support of the mother and trying to find programmes was costly. The only cost to CYF for safe@home was the cost of the steering group member's time.

New Zealand Police

Interviewees from NZ Police reported that participation in the project gave staff a focus and “sharpened them up” in terms of how to respond to family violence. They also credited the project with generating an increase in reporting from population groups who traditionally did not report family violence incidents (for example, new migrant and refugee groups).

Several informants reported that the project enhanced trust of police by victims, and that women were therefore more likely to call for assistance. Perceptions of police changed from their being the ones who came around to take the woman away to refuge to being a part of a positive intervention. This was confirmed by the women themselves. On the client information sheets they were asked about their confidence in the police. Twenty five of the 30 women who answered this question reported that they were confident in the police response and four of them reported that their confidence in the police had improved because of the project. Comments included:

They come fast if I use the alarm

Their attitudes are getting better – no blaming and asking “What did you do?”

One informant commented that participation in the project enabled police to do something practical for the victims rather than just offering moral support.

Some of the victims, you're continually seeing their names on my desk every Monday morning, and then all of a sudden they stop and you find out they have both separated and the house has been target-hardened and they've got an alarm and basically things are better – he's not there anymore and she's trying to get on with it. (Interview: NZ Police)

Housing New Zealand

Housing New Zealand reported three gains from safe@home:

- less damage to the homes now protected from the offender
- less likelihood of rent arrears
- faster response to re-securing the home than they themselves were able to provide.

Housing New Zealand was also less likely to be approached for relocation, which was difficult for them to facilitate. "It's hard to relocate when there are no houses". Over all, they believed the project was positive for their clients, and therefore for Housing New Zealand:

What they are doing is improving the life of our customers. (Interview: Housing NZ)

Another informant commenting on the damage to property said that the tenants were charged for damage and were likely to go to Work and Income for support to pay those costs, so the project led to cost savings to government over all.

The improvements in security to the properties also potentially have a long term sustainable benefit for the clients, and all tenants who follow after the clients. Some of the changes being made, such as replacing glass doors with wooden doors and security on windows should have a lasting benefit not only for family violence incidents but other incidents such as burglary.

General

Informants were asked about the fit with other services, and all stated that safe@home was complementary. One stated that it was complementary to FVIARS high-risk meetings, as it was an addition to the safety plan for the family.

Other benefits and unexpected positive consequences

The engagement at the table in the steering group of agencies and businesses for whom family violence was not core business meant that more individuals became conscious of and supportive of victims of domestic violence. Informants believed that the project was likely to aid community buy-in to zero tolerance of domestic violence.

It was also suggested that victims were more likely to be willing to testify in court because they knew that they were safe from the offender after the hearing – he could not get to them because their home was a safe place to go back to. This meant that there was less time wasted in court by victims being unwilling to testify due to fear of the consequences.

Several steering group members commented on improvements in what were already positive relationships via participation in the steering group. As one steering group member said:

It gives you the feeling that you are actually doing something for the community; giving something back gives great pleasure. (Interview: SPM)

Down-sides

Most informants were unable to think of a down-side for the project, even when they were probed about concerns, about barriers, and about improvements. But apart from the feedback reported under “what did not go well”, the informants were overwhelmingly positive about the project.

They commented on the need to know that there would be ongoing funding and that it would be good to offer such a service in other areas (beginning with the east area of Central Auckland).

Success factors

A number of factors were identified which were seen by informants as critical to project success.

The ability of all agencies that had a role in the project to respond quickly was vital. The project coordinator reviewed the call-out list daily and contacted victims who appeared to meet the entry criteria immediately. Police provided offender information fast. SPM builders responded immediately to the referral – the team were able to go in within the day for the most important items, like locks, and then started the rest of the work as soon as possible thereafter (often within the week).

Victims, shine* advocates and steering group members all reported that SPM builders did “a fantastic job”. In general the selected contractors needed to have:

- a high-quality team available at short notice (selected workers who were safe for work with vulnerable people)
- a great work record
- the ability to coordinate the trades team (it would not be possible for the project coordinator to coordinate the trades people in addition to her other tasks).

The point was also made with respect to project staff that the project coordinator needed to have a broad range of skills, and advocates and coordinator needed to be able to work well together.

Conclusions

The long-term goals of the safe@home project were to:

- reduce participants’ fear of continuing violence and allow them to feel confident in their homes
- increase stability for adults and children who had experienced domestic violence by providing security systems and resources so they were able to stay in their own homes and school(s) and continue to maintain contact with family, friends and support networks
- decrease the “spiral to poverty” for adults and children who had experienced domestic violence.

The preliminary evidence presented in this report strongly indicated good progress towards achieving the first goal. Victims’ fear of continuing violence was significantly reduced in the short term and there was indicative evidence that they were safer.

A longer-term follow-up of clients benefiting from the project would be needed to show whether this reduced fear and increased safety was maintained in the long term. Victims and their children who otherwise may have had to move, either temporarily into a refuge or permanently to escape the

offender, were able to stay in their own homes, and victims reported improved wellbeing for themselves and their children. Whether these gains were maintained over the long term was beyond the scope of this evaluation.

This project had overwhelming support from all involved with it. The informants from the project steering group represented many years of experience in dealing with family violence, and it is from that base of experience that their views of the effectiveness of safe@home were formed. According to these informants the project successfully targeted victims at the highest end of the risk spectrum for ongoing harassment and injury, and provided practical support for them. According to the victims who received the service, the project made a huge difference to their own safety and wellbeing and in many cases also to the wellbeing of their children. There is evidence of a reduction in police family violence call-outs after the intervention for these victims over the three-month follow-up period of the study.

The components of the project – monitored personal alarms, security upgrades, phones, and the offer of police drive-bys – were not all necessary in all cases. The highly skilled project coordinator was critical as it was she who made the assessment of the appropriate components for each client and so determined what was required in terms of resources and cost to ensure safety for each victim.

The intervention was not suitable for all victims. For victims who needed the offender to assist with childcare, or who were ambivalent about separation from the offender, other interventions were needed to insure ongoing safety. For victims at risk from repeat offenders (and in particular for those who had begun the protection order process) the intervention offered a significant tool for supporting a violence-free environment for themselves and their children.

Appendix: Methods

This was a formative evaluation designed to collect and analyse information to answer the following questions about the implementation of the service:

- Did the project meet its delivery targets, and if not why not?
- Were the homes safety audited, and what did the safety audits find?
- What were the changes made to the houses, and what equipment was provided?
- Was there evidence that victims were safer and/or felt safer as a result of the intervention?

In addition we asked key informants: “What worked well and why?” and “What did not work well, and why?”

The evaluation was not an outcomes or impact evaluation but did collate and analyse victims’ self reports of their safety and wellbeing before and after the security upgrades. Independent information on the effectiveness of the service was not sourced. Victims participating in the safe@home project were not interviewed for the evaluation.

Data sources used to answer the questions included:

- NZ Police domestic violence database records of police call-outs.
- shine* client database and client information sheets
- interviews with informants (shine* staff and representatives of agencies on the steering group).

Data collection and analysis

Clients engaging with the safe@home project signed a consent form for information to be used for the evaluation. Names were used to cross-link across the sources of data, and then deleted. No identifying data for the evaluation has been kept. Demographic information was taken from the shine* project database. Additional information was available on the client information sheets that were filled in before and after the security upgrade for 30 of the 50 clients. The time between the first and second recording on the information sheets varied. Victims were contacted only after all modifications to their homes had been completed, and in some cases there was difficulty in making contact to complete the second form. Information was entered on a spreadsheet and both counts and quotes were presented where relevant to the evaluation questions. Police maintained a district domestic violence database that included information on call-outs in the project area. This data was used to examine experiences of police call-outs before and after the intervention.

Variables reported from the shine* database include:

- ethnicity
- shine* risk score
- age
- numbers and ages of children in the house
- protection order status
- source of referral
- reasons for ineligibility.

6 Victims were not interviewed by the evaluator, but the shine* project coordinator collected client responses to the project on client information sheets.

Variables reported from the clients' information sheets include:

- self-assessed fear of harm before and after the security upgrade
- client comments on fear of harm
- client wellbeing comments
- client comments on child wellbeing
- client reports of intention to move
- trust in police and other agencies

Variables reported from the Police database include:

- police risk scores
- number of call-outs before and after the intervention.

Information from the safety audits and invoices for the changes to the homes was collated onto a spread sheet and is the source of the information provided on the costs of the intervention per client.

Nine informants were interviewed about their views of the project. Interviews were undertaken with agency representatives of NZ Police (2), Housing New Zealand (1), CYF (1), shine* (3), SPM builders (1), BUPA (1), and NZ Fire Service (1). Interviews were recorded, and notes taken at the time of the interview were reviewed and upgraded by a second listening to the interview (not transcribed). The analysis identified all information provided under each question. Where information and opinion was confirmed by multiple informants, this is reported in the relevant section. Quotes were taken from the notes and checked by informants for accuracy and context.