

## Herstory of Hestia

Hestia Rodney Women's Refuge was founded by a small group of local women who recognised a dangerous gap in support for wāhine and tamariki experiencing family violence in the area between the North Shore and Whangārei. This is our story — and the story of how refuge services grew in Rodney.

### Before there was a Refuge

Before Hestia existed, the Warkworth Women's Resource Centre held a small contract to provide short-term emergency support — just three days at a time. Women and children were placed wherever safety could be found: a bach, a holiday home, and sometimes even in the homes of workers.

As demand increased through the mid-1990s (including after the Domestic Violence Act 1996 and rapid population growth north of Auckland), it became clear this was no longer enough. Bednights rose sharply, and staff were stretched beyond capacity. With the nearest refuges based in Whangārei or the North Shore, Rodney families were falling through the cracks.

### A feasibility study — and a decision to act (1996–1997)

In late 1996, funding was secured for a feasibility study into the need for a dedicated refuge service in Rodney. The study confirmed what local workers already knew: demand was growing, the existing model was unsustainable, and confidentiality and safety were at risk if services remained combined.

The recommendations were clear: safe house work needed to be separate from the Women's Centre, and a permanent safe house was urgently needed.

### Opening the first safe house (1997)

With limited initial funding secured for a short period, the team worked quickly to find a property and furnish it from scratch through community support. In August 1997, the first safe house opened.

In those early months, four women committed to working without pay to prove the need for the service and fight for sustainable funding. The work was tough, the learning curve steep, and the need undeniable — but the commitment to confidentiality, dignity, and safety never wavered.

It was during this time that the name **Hestia** was born — after the Greek Goddess of the hearth, sanctuary, and peacemaker.

## Building a professional refuge service (1998–2001)

From 1998 onwards, Hestia focused on strengthening foundations: developing Standards of Practice, establishing supervision and staff support, building governance, and working toward incorporation and charitable status.

In 1998, a new safe house was secured in Warkworth. By 1999, Hestia became an incorporated society and affiliated with the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges — a major milestone that strengthened training, standards, and national connection.

Over these years, services expanded, systems became more robust, and outreach support grew alongside safe house demand.

## Growth, outreach, and community collaboration (2002–2007)

As the years progressed, Hestia's work continued to grow across Rodney and the Hibiscus Coast. The organisation strengthened partnerships, contributed to wider family violence prevention initiatives, and expanded specialist support for women and children.

By the mid-2000s, increased staffing and service demand led to the establishment of an office in Orewa while maintaining a base in Warkworth. Hestia also deepened collaboration with agencies including Police, Victim Support, and community networks — supporting high-risk safety planning and coordinated responses.

## Ten years on — and a new chapter (2007–2008)

In 2007, Hestia marked ten years since opening the first safe house — a decade of determination, growth, and community-backed progress.

In September 2008, Hestia relocated the Safe House to **Rodney area**, supporting the continued expansion and centralisation of services.