

## Putting Our Children First

Richard\* (nine) and his older brother Anthony\* (ten) are just two of the many children who have undertaken Aviva's Tamariki programme, which supports children to learn about and understand their experience of family violence, so that they can be supported to overcome its effects.

Richard and Anthony were living with their mum's mother, but it wasn't ideal. Hygiene was an issue; Mum's boyfriend was an ex-gang member, who beat her in front of the boys and threatened and physically intimidated them; the house was full with several other adults and their families and in general the boys weren't getting the attention they needed. Their school alerted Child Youth and Family (CYF) and at a Family Group Conference dad Carl\*, who had seen his sons every other weekend, finally heard about what life for them was really like. From that point on Carl became a full-time dad, with support from his mother.

At first the brothers always wanted to be together - they were each other's security. But Dad's flat was small and cramped and there was nowhere outside to play. When the boys got angry they would act out, kicking and punching holes in the door and walls.

A CYF worker gave the family a brochure about Aviva and, encouraged by Anthony's teacher, Carl brought the boys in to discuss the Tamariki programme. Anthony first did the group, then Richard after him. "I noticed a difference straight away" says Carl. "They had been uncontrollable at home before. Their Nana would look after them while I was working evenings and I'd sometimes have to come home to help, or I'd be called to the school to pick one of them up as they were out of control. Now they're calmer. We've had a lot of different help, but I think the programme did them a lot of good - it helped them change their behaviour and attitudes. They have a more controlled way of dealing with things. Even when have their moments, now they can snap out of it, whereas before they used to go on and on. They're just back to being brothers. They're more confident than what they were - they are playing sport for the first time. They are normal boys - they've changed 100%."

Richard finished group at the end of 2014 and says one of his favourite things (as for all of the children who do the Tamariki programme) was the food! But he says he also enjoyed meeting other kids and talking to them. His highlight was learning about abuse and he became more aware of his own safety and how to keep himself safe (e.g. locking himself in a room; calling 111; going to neighbours for help).

\*Not their real names