

For the Treasury

How can government improve
results for our most vulnerable
(at-risk) children and their families?



Submitted on behalf of
Family Works across New Zealand



Presbyterian Support

Part 1: Your contact details and response summary

Organisation Name:	<p>Family Works New Zealand is the Trust formed by the Presbyterian Support regions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Northern• East Coast• Central• Upper South Island• South Canterbury• Otago• Southland <p>This submission has drawn on the collaborative views and experience of our Family Work services.</p>
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What geographical location does your response relate to?	Across all of New Zealand
What group of people or issues is your response targeted towards?	We deliver to thousands of clients, this response is for the consideration of Government decision makers/departments, and other service providers
Does your response relate to a new service or modification of existing services?	Both

Part 2: Your RFI response

A: What works best to identify and engage the children and their families most at-risk of poor education, criminal justice and employment outcomes?

For example...

What are successful ways to find and engage the most hard to reach children and families?

- Generally these clients are able to be identified by NGO's families. Engagement is more difficult and relies on the development of an authentic and accountable helping relationship.
- Providing place-based support. Being flexible and able to deliver early intervention – high needs support in local communities. Family Works provides interventions at the point of need – evidence shows overwhelmingly that if referral a for service is made to a provider, and the service is provided in a timely fashion, the change needed occurs. Eg Family Works Central has supported smaller community organisations utilising the sphere of influence approach. Family Works Managers sit on small community Boards, e.g. Women's Refuge, Night Shelter, Youth at Risk Centres. We are able to utilise the knowledge and capacity of a larger organisation to support smaller organisations.
- Developing genuine and authentic relationships with those most at risk. For example Family Works PSUSI locates Family Workers in Kindergartens. Becoming a known and trusted part of a community, and being able to bring community members together in a way that is meaningful to them, eg from schools, community hubs where budgeting, Work and Income or crisis foodbank, financial or housing support services are also provided. Whakawhanaungatanga is important and is accorded enough time for both parties to understand who they are, where they come from and their role. People often do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.
- Providing time generous services. Building trusted relationships, making assessments and delivering interventions takes time. Funding provided for a prescribed number of sessions is counterproductive and often unrealistic in it's expectations. For Youth Justice parenting programmes funding is only provided for 8 (one hour) sessions. But we are working with families of young people that have had a lifetime of dysfunction and sometimes a long history of offending. It can be unsafe for a worker to attend by themselves, so two workers will go on home visits. Then there's travel time, and admin time, reading the history and updating the case notes. Eight hours gets eaten up pretty quickly, and in this time we're meant to achieve major life changes.
- Realistic expectations. Outcomes funding can help NGO's focus on where to put their efforts, however required outcomes need to be realistic. Whilst still contributing towards the better public service outcomes, the outcomes NGO's are responsible are often shorter term or intermediate outcomes. For example for a child to achieve at school, their physical needs have to be met – (Maslow's hierarchy) they need to have food and shelter, and to thrive they need to be loved, and parented positively. Organisational sustainability needs to be recognised by baseline activity funding.
- Often the most at-risk people in our communities will identify an immediate need at a time of crisis, and the ability to help with this, engage them with our organisation and begin to build a trusting relationship, will enable further support work to follow. By providing this type of support and wrap-around services, vulnerable children and adults can be reached.. The presenting need for food, for example, may be due to financial abuse or addiction, or lack of housing, or not accessing the right level of financial support. At risk people may be unwilling to disclose underlying issues until they have built a relationship of trust with an organisation. Providing "wrap around" services in one place has advantages for clients – they don't have to spend time energy, money (for transport) going to numerous places to have their needs met.
- This is often not well understood by Govt funders, and the introduction of targeted funding for

specific needs and outcomes, may put at risk our ability to engage the most at-risk community member who will not present to any services with their underlying needs

- Another way to develop relationships with at-risk parents and children is through becoming involved in children's schools. For example delivering group programmes in schools, enable parent- contacts which leads to home visits, which lead to relationship building, and people asking for help when they need it. A visible presence at school drop off and pick-up time sparks conversations, which leads to relationship building and people asking for help when they need it
- The people, the people, the people: neighbours know, friends know, external family know. We need to think about how we can encourage these people to connect to the issue without making them feel like they are making things worse for the family. Some of our work is done from a community development perspective that is very grass roots and reaches the people who would otherwise shy away from agency support – eg Gang families in Pine Hill Dunedin who are now actively involved in community based programmes, parenting classes, after school homework centre and the community garden.
- Most Family Works Hawke's Bay clients are referred by CYF, Health services, etc. When referred by CYF families understand they are working with Family Works Hawke's Bay as this is preferable to working with CYF. Families feel threatened by CYF with the possibility of having their children removed. Engagement is a critical part of service delivery. Often even initially reluctant clients develop relationships with trusted workers and overcome the barriers to change.
- We suggest a better way of contractually reporting on CYF clients is to report the numbers of clients you are working with that have CYF involvement, rather than those directly referred form CYF, as the number with CYF involvement is far greater than the number of direct referrals, and gives a better idea of the intensity of the work.
- Early intervention – e.g antenatal onwards, starts during pregnancy. Brainwave Trust Research. Education begins during pregnancy
- Mothers are in hospital for such a short time – mothers at risk helped to stay longer or develop a service alongside similar to Holly House in CHCH where Mum and baby stay and are well supported plus Dad
- Follow up services/keep connecting – Plunket funded better to provide ongoing contact with mother and baby.
- Wrap around services and one stop shops. A hub at a school or community centre with health and social services , where everyone comes together
- Engaging difficult to reach families needs to come from a whole of society approach. People are so isolated and no one dares speak up about a neighbour who is struggling or abusing their children. Most people don't even know their neighbours! Institutions such as churches which formally provide its of social support are being eroded. Community Hubs – include cooking classes, budgeting, exercise etc anything that contributes to holistic wellbeing of children/young people and families
- Don't just spent time studying systems that work better in other countries e.g Sweden – implement them put some of their successful ideas in place
- We would question the value of spending vast sums of money researching and producing "White Papers" if you are not going to take on board what has already been said by agencies/organisation and people who know their own communities issues and some of the solutions
- Providing in depth support to beneficiaries – for example Youth Service (YP/YPP) has helped one region engage with a large number of vulnerable young people, as part of their payment obligations they are mandated to engage. They are also incentivised to undertake certain activities, such as budgeting and parenting courses, which makes it easier to engage with young people in this way.

- Where similar outcomes are sought
- MSD's strong focus on evaluation within the ISO project is to be commended, and given time will enable a strong evidence base of 'what works' to be developed. There does however need to be some caution that the development of RBAs and other effectiveness measures is streamlined and well-coordinated, so that resources are not wasted. Government needs to consider providing web-based reporting solutions that meet mutual needs of funder and provider to enable common outcomes reporting. These would need to be compatible with a wide variety of client management systems. These should contain a mix of 'hard data' and client self-report perspectives, as ultimately it is the client who knows what has worked and why.

B: How could existing services or supports be improved to make the biggest difference to children and their families at most risk of poor education, criminal justice and employment outcomes?

For example...

How could existing services be better delivered? (this could include services directly provided by government, or by private or not-for-profit providers or other groups)

- Meeting basic needs and being productive members of a community are important. Disenfranchised community members are often isolated, and this contributes to abuse and neglect, family violence, poor educational and employment outcomes, and crime. We need to understand that unemployed members of a community who volunteer their time within their community, feel valued and are helping to build social capital, are spending their time usefully, and build pride in their community. This often leads to development of transferable skills that can enhance employment potential. Family Works provides community development and other opportunities for at-risk people to build capacity and capability to increase independence. Our focus is on supporting vulnerable children, young people and families, and strengthening communities, and community connectedness for families.
- Work and Income support/criteria is increasingly difficult to access. The system, and experience of it by both clients, and NGO advocates, is extremely variable across the country. Govt social services need to be better coordinated to ensure at-risk community members are receiving support to have basic needs met. Housing shortages across many parts of the country increase poverty, and risk to children, young people and families.
- Not for profit services could be collocated with other community services, such as schools, doctors surgeries, or Work and Income services
- Much of the high risk complex work undertaken within communities is carried out by community organisations with voluntary clients, and risk to children and families is managed through relationship building, safety planning and engaging the appropriate mix of services – often within the organisation. In most cases only where this approach is insufficient to provide safety for children and families, are statutory services referred to, and often if CYF is referred to, this service will refer back to Family Works to provide the family support.
- Funding for the active promotion of services would help, and promote early intervention. At present little of this is done due to big work loads, high referral numbers and lack of funding.

What would need to change to improve the effectiveness of services for the most at-risk groups?

- Focussed on connected families
- Govt understanding and financially supporting NGO services and community development work. Currently MSD community funding for at-risk families, is only 60% of the cost of delivery. This puts the sustainability of service provision and viability of effective service providers at risk. Family Work has a commitment to employing qualified staff, and providing safe and effective services to community. The complexity of need is growing. This has been cited by several Govt departments recently, however funding to the community services which have the expertise to both reach vulnerable communities, and respond to the complex needs, are under resourced to

do this work. Govt needs to recognise that in order to attract, and retain highly qualified staff, we need to pay them a living wage.

- Service effectiveness would be improved by better coordination of Govt services, valuing the contributions of the NGO sector and working in partnership with us.
- Govt often funds services according to specific age and funding stream siloes. For example MoE funds Incredible Years parenting programmes for at-risk families with school-age children. This is due to the link with Positive Behaviour for Learning, School-wide strategies within the Ministry. This parenting programme would likely be more effective, if available to parents of toddlers. The reasons including: learning effective parenting strategies when children are younger would reduce behavioural problems by school-age; reduce anxiety and increase learning ability in children by the time they reach school age; more confident and resilient parents of school-age children. Unfortunately, the Incredible Parents course for toddlers is not currently being funded due to re-prioritised funding in line with other school-based strategies.
- Funding for contracts working with these families need to be outcome, not time/ number of sessions focussed. Making change for at risk families usually takes more than 10 sessions and more than one service. The money and the services need to be there for at least 18 months to start to see real change at a family and community level.
- An integrated approach is best. Statutory services are important to establish the non-negotiable around care and protection and youth justice. NGO's can then provide the support and motivation for parents to improve their protection and care of children. Their NGO relationship with the client is a longer term relationship which is based on assessment and planning and transformation. NGOs can monitor over a period of time to ensure results are sustainable.
- NGO's supporting services and communities funding for the work that they are undertaking with at risk families is severely underfunded. We are not able to sustain this in its current state – many NGO's have waiting lists for essential core social services from 3 – 6 months and many are reducing the range of services they are able to provide. This is a very real concern for provincial/rural towns and significantly increases the risk to children/families in these areas.
- Sufficient funding for the initial phase of engagement/assessment/planning for agencies. This takes huge amounts of time during a prolonged (3-6 months) period for families in high and complex needs, then another chunk of time for 6-18 months keeping things on track and remaining connected
- Support for families with children to move from cities back into provincial/rural areas especially where other family/whanau members live parents/grandparents/aunts/uncles where they would get guidance with parenting, practical support. A transition benefit for a period of time Funding – making services and education easily accessible e.g social housing and WINZ are not as accessible as they should be
- Some of the basic needs for our most vulnerable families are being increasingly difficult to access through govt services– Work and Income support and eligibility criteria, Housing NZ
- Holly House type facilities available in more areas/main centres they need to be well resourced/funded
- Providing more funding and support for therapy – type services – currently very limited in South Canterbury. Most at risk clients cannot afford therapy if it is available
- South Canterbury has a very limited social service agencies for children, young people and families
- FW Central has a restorative justice team who facilitate conferences for the criminal court and in the area of family violence. The outcomes of these meetings are effective in enhancing community and family support to address the needs identified, accountability and safety plans are developed by whanau. Evidence from the MOJ is robust is showing the impact of this process on both perpetrator and victim.

- Shortage of affordable and decent standard of housing in our community
- Landlords need a WOF
- Stop selling all your housing stock
- More controls around synthetic drugs, alcohol which destroys families and has been for generations
- Make compulsory for all Dads to do a parenting programme in prisons – conditions of release. Brainwave information.
- All parenting programmes that are proven to make a difference are fully funded at all levels e.g Incredible Years is currently funded for parents of children 3-8 years which is great but we need to fund the Bay and Toddler Programmes as well. (Early Intervention).
- Payment (not only board payment but a retainer type salary) for caregivers to care for more difficult cases and then for CYF to do the work to extensively address the issues children came into care for in a timely manner.
- Specialist home support and monitoring for complex family situations while issues are worked through.

C: What issues or problems are not currently being addressed that increase the risks to some children of not achieving in education or employment?

For example...

What are the particular issues in your community?

- Housing inadequacies (including HNZ stock) and shortages
- Lack of adequate funding to provide the range and level of services to respond to identified needs. Reliance on corporate or philanthropic funding is unrealistic in many communities. Philanthropic funding has become very difficult to access since the recession as returns on investments have been reduced and as Govt funding reductions/lack of CPI adjustments over time, more NGOs have sought to access this funding. In many small impoverished communities, corporate sponsorship is not possible, and in other communities support is provided by way of donations of food for foodbanks or other in-kind support.
- Access to community mental health services – especially counselling. In some areas DHB child and adolescent mental health support is confined to assessment, leaving community organisations to respond to the counselling need, with no funding to do so. Lack of funding means limited counselling hours and long waiting lists within the community, raising risk levels and potentially reducing ability of children and young people to learn
- Few alternatives to traditional paid work in areas where employment opportunities are low. Community enhancement/development work that would teach skills and develop potential for self/community-run employment initiatives and innovation
- Technology has severely impacted on opportunities for employment for those in the manual labour area which many of our clients are. For e.g self service petrol stations, self service check outs at supermarkets and computers now doing a lot of work people did. Off shore call centres have also contributed to a reduction in employment. Some areas such as farming although available often have a negative reputation for how staff are treated which is off putting for those seeking employment. Also, when employed in this area families experience stress of the absence of the father due to the long hours of work.

Are there any services needed which aren't currently available? What are they?

- In rural areas there is often a lack of access to health, welfare and community services. Lack of recognition of the cost of travel and the poverty levels which reduce access to these services. Community services are often provided to cover a region at a fixed price – not recognising the increased cost of reach into rural areas. Eg Social Workers in Schools. Same level of funding for

rural and urban delivery. In many rural areas, social workers are servicing multiple schools/communities with high transport costs and no extra funding. Lack of access may result in families not adequately supported, and reduced educational achievement, and employment

- There is not enough affordable suitable safe housing to meet demand
- The other issue is there is not enough of what is available.
- Social workers available through all schools, kindergartens and doctors surgeries, so that anyone who wants help can access it. Investing in help when people first need it provides long term dividends.
- Effective drug and alcohol services, particularly for women raising children
- Mental health services for people who do not meet the extremely high thresholds for crisis services
- Funding for vulnerable children to take part in activities that connect them positively into the community, such as playing a musical instrument, joining clubs based on their strengths and interests, going on camps, taking swim lessons, trying sports. Children are sometimes offered these experiences through mentors, that also the chance to develop positive supportive relationships with another adult.
- At the macro level, it would help vulnerable families if more of the Law Commissions Recommendations on Alcohol were taken on board

Are the underlying causes of poor outcomes being addressed?

- Underlying causes of poor outcomes are being addressed to a certain extent. This could be improved by fully funding community services, and better access/coordination of Govt services (Work and Income, mental health/addiction services) recognising that the outcomes of the work being undertaken with at-risk, vulnerable children, young people and families is often incremental, and long term, sustainable outcomes are difficult to quantify when there are complex issues and multiple systems involved. Eg progress can be hindered with stressed families when there is no available housing, or financial support – families on low incomes and benefit often get into a cycle of increasing debt to meet basic health, and transport needs
- We are ignoring the fact that abuse and neglect happens in white wealthy communities too and there is a risk that children in those communities are not being identified, seen or heard.
- We are looking at the issues at family level and the reality is they are often wider community issues such as gang influence, sports culture, racism and other community level issues. The reason our child death stats are so high is because even when some families change, the community doesn't and therefore the problem carries on under the surface. We need policy makers at Treasury and Government level who really understand Community Development, who "get it". And we need services to start working with communities alongside individuals.
- Poverty is a huge issue and unemployment and seasonal work. All these have an impact on the ability of families to cope on very limited income and high debt levels.
- Children starting school who are not ready for school is a concern.
- Family violence is an epidemic in our community. We provide a suite of services around family violence but generally services are fragmented and very few evaluate their results. The real gap is the quality of services provided and the lack of accountability and efficacy.
 - Poverty – increase benefits, better access to social housing
 - Poverty especially child poverty
 - Lack of incentive to get a job due to low wages
 - Govt agencies not working together – Family Court and CYF. In Family Court there is a lack of focus on Paramountcy of the Child and the Child's view. Decisions made are not always in best interest of the child, even for lawyer for child involved –

needs a different approach

- Concerns for migrant families especially women and children –driven from the increasing demand for workers in the dairy industry – transient families, poor support and inadequate working conditions
- Children whole needs are not met by the existing criteria for different services e.g IEPS/CAMHS
- Dads are often not allowed to have contact or often unsupervised contact with their children until they have completed a parenting programme. The Incredible Years parenting programme which is delivered across the country and is hugely successful requires parents to have children in their care so that the information/strategies can be practiced – therefore these Dads cannot access this programme if they do not have access to their children. There are not many other options available to dads – could be delivered in Polytechs
- Respect, uphold and value the important job of parenting, and recognise families as the cornerstone of society. Recognise that there are times when at home parenting is more valuable than work.

D: What new interventions, services or arrangements could make the biggest difference for at-risk children and their families?

Early intervention programmes such as Incredible Years at all levels Baby/Toddler programmes as well. Parenting Through Separation. Followed up with ongoing support in the home for those families where the need has been identified, those most at risk – each community knows who they are – we are all investing huge amounts of time and money there already but if we had one co-ordinated, concentrated plan with all agencies what would we be able to achieve.

Education for staff working in the secondary education area on Brain Development and Relationships

A focus on strong mental health and emotional wellbeing, including an obligation for schools to have strong pastoral care systems (as reported by students and parents), and when accessing social support is as easy as accessing a GP

For example...

What existing models used in New Zealand or internationally could be used in your area?

- Family Works already provides wrap-around, community based services and good collaborative working relationships with other community, and Govt services. In many parts of the country, a mix of social work, counselling, physiological services, foodbank, budgeting, parenting and child and youth programmes, social workers in schools, family violence support, referrals from CYF, MoJ mediation and separation support, Dept of Corrections Out of Gate support for women being released from prison. These services are all locally managed by service centres delivering within the community and connected to the community people are living within, providing in many cases, wrap-around support. This model works well in achieving good outcomes for clients, and enabling access to additional services where needed, that build on gains made from initial service provision.

How can services respond to the complexity and diversity of family circumstances?

- When working with high risk community members with complex needs, an ability to work with one effective lead provider in a trusting relationship, provides the best opportunities for good outcome. This work is compromised by reductions in funding and targeting of services to meet aspects of the overall need. Effective community services able to provide appropriate levels of response to individual family members and the family as a whole, from early intervention to high risk, will achieve optimum outcomes over time. There is no quick-fix to meet complex needs, and as noted above, change/long term outcomes are incremental and can be difficult to quantify in the short-term.

How can the government better target and measure results for at-risk children and their families? (eg, through outcomes-based contracts)

- Outcomes-based contracting needs to be considered carefully, and as described above, ensure that access to support for early intervention or crisis services is not compromised, as this is often the gateway to engagement and assessment for more comprehensive service provision over time. Families, children and young people with complex needs will often have environmental and social issues which result in crises during the life of an intervention, and may hinder forward progress for a time. These crises cannot always be predicted and put huge pressure on limited resources to provide support.

Family Works' experience to date, suggests that the extra practitioner and management cost incurred by the organisation to ensure good outcomes are achieved by some outcomes-based contracts, far outweighs the funding provided. Reasons for this include housing unavailability, mental health issues not factored into the referral, and other high needs not identified prior to referral. Fixed cost for service, means that these additional costs are not covered, or the client does not achieve the outcomes contracted. This is not sustainable.

- Help communities establish community hubs/ centres that are effective and sustainable. Centralising services in the town or city centre has its place, but we need satellite community hubs for social and health services if we are going shift the needle on population based change.
- Target services that address the family – child protection and children witnessing family violence is a family whanau issue. We need services for children, as well as services for adults that are connected and not fragmented.

Other thoughts and feedback

37 children in New Zealand died over the last 36 months. In addition there were many others who were seriously injured, some with life long effects, and countless other incidents of abuse and neglect that went undetected and unreported. Out there, somebody somewhere (other than the abuser themselves) knows – or at least suspects – what is going on. The rate of child abuse and neglect in this country is not only the fault of the abusers. It is the fault of every person who turns a blind eye, does not listen and refuses to acknowledge what is happening around them. It is the responsibility of EVERY New Zealander to respond, react and do something to change our statistics. All it takes for evil to conquer is for good men (and women) to do nothing”

A campaign is needed at a national level that makes us all aware that we are ALL responsible and accountable for every incident of abuse, neglect and violence that is perpetrated on children in our society. It is everyone's responsibility to take care of their neighbour, their community and to ensure that families who may be at risk get the help, support and (where necessary) intervention they need.

A campaign run in partnership by MSD, Ministry of Health, and Treasury could market key messages about “It is everyone's fault and everyone's responsibility – and we can all do something to make a difference” across public media, in government marketing and media (such as Treasury Policy Report) and targeted messaging to teachers, community groups, and other groups who have regular interaction with children. The “Its Not Ok” campaign is great – but it still leaves the general public with a view that this issue is not something that affects them. Make it real, personal and applicable to everyone.

It would be great to see the Families Commission, Children's Commission and Human Rights Commission doing something collaboratively for this.

Child abuse, neglect and violence is not a cause – neither is the tag of “at risk”. They are symptoms and there needs to be more understanding of what the root causes are. It is not all about the poverty line. The way that media and government have portrayed it you would think that all poor people are abusive and neglectful of their children (especially Maori and PI), and that white, middle-class/ rich people do not neglect or abuse their children and families. This is a misleading perception and it needs to be addressed. There are a number of causes for child and family

neglect and abuse, and the causes can be found in most social demographics. Poverty is but one stressor – others include work stress, financial stress (yes, wealthy people also have financial stresses, they are just different), alcohol and drugs, mental health issues, and history of abuse.

More information and training on the root causes that may trigger alarm bells would be helpful, and a more balanced portrayal of what neglect and abuse looks like (it isn't always brown and dirt poor!)

Finally, while the Vulnerable Children's Action Plan has gone some way to addressing the current models for dealing with the issue, it stops short of addressing fundamental issues of resourcing and modelling for service provision. If we (New Zealanders) are serious about getting our child death rates down, then we need to INVEST money and resources. If 23,000 children are "on the list" as vulnerable, and each of them (and their families) need 1-2 years of wrap around service and community support, then we need to be prepared to pay for that. Otherwise, all the work currently being done on this issue will have been wasted because it won't be able to be applied at grass-roots where the real need for resources exists.