

# social work now

*The Practice Journal of Child, Youth and Family*

Te Hautaka ako te Tari

Āwhina i te Tamaiti, te

Rangatahi, tae atu ki te Whānau

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# Te Hokinga Mai – Coming Home

*Jo Field discusses youth justice and the family group conference*

Family group conferencing is at the cutting edge of family-centred practice. The Children, Young Persons, and their Families Act 1989 (the Act) puts children and families first, and enshrines the principles of family-led practice. It is one of the most innovative pieces of legislation across international jurisdictions.

The recent Child, Youth and Family conference Coming Home – Te Hokinga Mai was a wonderful experience for the people who attended, and a fabulous opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the family group conference (FGC). Now in its 18th year, it is clear that the mechanism of the FGC has embedded family decision making into everyday practice in both care and protection and youth justice. The conference highlighted how the FGC has matured, and well and truly stood the test of time. There were many examples of the success and value of the FGC. There was strong evidence of the energy and commitment to address the ongoing challenges for the FGC in the contemporary practice environment.

It was also pleasing to see the enthusiasm with which our overseas colleagues have embraced the notion of the FGC and to see that it is now a central part of practice in many jurisdictions. We have lessons to learn from overseas practice

as they have adapted the original concept of the FGC and applied it to different and specialist situations.

I am delighted that this edition of *Social Work Now* is featuring three key articles from the conference. I am confident that the issues and discussion raised in these articles provide opportunity for debate and reflection in both frontline practice and policy development. I look forward to the FGC process continuing to be at the heart of good social work practice. Family-led practice is up to all of us to protect, nurture and maintain. We are the guardians of the Act and it is up to us to rekindle its spirit and revitalise its purpose.

It does seem timely to look at the wider issues around this and we are including an article exploring the youth justice practice framework.

This year we are making some changes to *Social Work Now* and will be featuring themed issues. Invited contributors will write substantive articles, and we will continue to welcome practice articles from social workers, other Child, Youth and Family staff and professionals working within the wider field. Articles can include accounts of innovative workplace practice, case reports, research, education, review articles, conference and workshop

reports. Please see the 'Information for Contributors' at the back of this journal for further details.

The August *Social Work Now* will be on family violence and December will examine practice issues around vulnerable families. We look forward to producing a practice journal that will be an effective professional resource.



*Jo Field is the Manager,  
Professional Practice, Office  
of the Chief Social Worker,  
Ministry of Social Development.*



# Innovative family decision making

*Ruth Dyson, Minister for Child, Youth and Family, celebrates the family group conference*

The family group conference (FGC) is indigenous. Its origins are uniquely New Zealand, but its principles are flexible and sound enough to be adapted to meet the cultural and societal conditions of many other nations.

Te Hokinga Mai, the 2006 International Conference on the FGC, offered all of us the opportunity to reflect on the journey which resulted, for New Zealand, in a radical change in our child welfare and youth justice systems. More importantly this was an opportunity to learn, to grow, and to share the varied experiences and the wealth of knowledge other countries can bring.

The value of conferences like this is that we can all share the experiences and learn from the developments in other countries. We all want what is best for our children and young people.

Here in New Zealand, we have been enthusiastic and delighted parents of the FGC. In our more reflective moments, like all parents, we concede

that we must learn from others if we are to continue being good parents of our tamariki. Parents get tired and grumpy. Quality time away is essential, and Te Hokinga Mai offered a long weekend away.

## *History of the FGC*

The FGC model was introduced in this country 18 years ago as a family decision-making process to be used in the statutory child welfare and youth justice systems. It radically altered the way decisions were made about children who were in need of care or protection and about young people who were offending. Our legislative model now requires that family become partners in the decision-making process as well as the key players in the future lives of their children.

The Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989 acknowledges that making any real changes for children and young people requires us to include – and wherever possible be led by – their families.



We all want what is best for our children and young people



I am proud that our country passed this legislation. It is unique in many ways – in my view, the most notable being the adaptation of Māori decision-making models and values and their application to wider New Zealand national identity concepts of fairness and justice.

Concerns developed in the 1970s and 1980s about the effectiveness of professional social welfare systems in engaging with Māori families and communities. Māori Advisory Units were established in some government departments in a desire to improve responsiveness to Māori in the development of policies and services, and greater numbers of Māori staff were recruited.

In 1984, three major government departments – Social Welfare, Justice and Māori Affairs – collaborated with Māori communities in the development of Maatua Whangai, a programme that focused on the return of Māori children and young people from institutional and foster care to the care of their family or extended family group. Māori practitioners began to have a significant impact on emerging models of practice that emphasised the importance of wider kinship and community connections in reaching enduring solutions about children's care and protection.

In 1985, the government established a Ministerial Advisory Committee to investigate whether Māori experienced institutional racism in the provision of departmental services. This committee was chaired by the late John Rangihau and included prominent Māori leaders and the chief executives of the Departments of Social Welfare and Māori Affairs, and the State Services Commission. The committee was asked specifically to advise on a Māori perspective for Social Welfare, which was then the Department responsible for child welfare and youth justice services. The committee process included a major

consultation with iwi and other communities, creating a significant opportunity for the voices and experiences of ordinary people to be heard.

The committee's report was named 'Puao-te-ata-tu' (Daybreak) and was released in 1986. It had a significant impact on the concurrent development of new legislation regarding children. The report recounted the difficulties and injustices created when the dominant culture imposed decision-making processes about Māori children and families without proper recognition of, and respect for, Māori family and social systems. Māori calls for greater levels of self-determination in matters relating to their children led to the formulation of a decision-making process known as the FGC. The FGC positions family groups, including wider family networks, to take leadership in working with the state's professionals to resolve any concerns and develop plans about children and young people.

The resulting Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act emphasised the importance of maintaining and strengthening relationships between young people and their family groups, and resolving matters within the context of family systems wherever possible. The FGC is the mechanism that gives expression to those goals. Key drivers in developing the legislation were cultural appropriateness, due process and family empowerment, and a need to offer effective diversionary procedures as an alternative to formal criminal and civil proceedings. These remain the driving principles behind the machinery of the legislation today.

The Act states clearly that wherever possible a child or young person's family, whānau, hapū, iwi or family group should participate in decision making affecting the child or young person and that the relationship between the children and young people and their families

should be maintained and strengthened. The FGC is the vital mechanism to ensure that this occurs in our work.

The new youth justice system did move away from the traditional welfare model, but was intended to meet justice and welfare needs by holding young offenders accountable for their actions while giving appropriate consideration to their needs. It is through the FGC process that these needs can be reconciled. FGCs include the young offender, the victim and their families in the decision-making process to reach a group consensus on a 'just' outcome. This reflects some aspects of Māori dispute resolution traditions. Other restorative justice ideologies are included by involving the victim in the decision making and encouraging mediation between the victim, the offender and their families.

### ***The Youth Justice Review and the Differential Response Model***

Looking back, the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act can be seen as heralding a huge philosophical shift from seeing children as chattels to nurturing and valuing them as taonga – our joy and our future.

Looking forward, this government is committed to ensuring that social services continue to be delivered in a way which strengthens children's places in their families and their communities. Two practical examples of this in Child, Youth and Family are the youth justice capability work currently underway and the Differential Response Model (DRM), which will further refine how we deliver care and protection services.

The review of youth justice capability has reaffirmed that we need to understand the

young person in the wider context of their lives, and that our people need to work more closely with communities and families. This will ensure that better quality information and advice is made available to FGCs, which, in turn, will lead to decisions that are more sustainable through a greater commitment to monitoring and concluding outcomes.

The DRM is designed to provide the right service to the right child at the right time. It is one of the most significant changes to social work intake practice in the last 15 years. The essence of the model is ensuring that responses to notifications of child abuse and neglect are proportionate and effective. It recognises that a formal investigation looking for evidence of

abuse is not always best for children, and DRM explicitly introduces alternatives to investigation such as support, referral to services or engagement through assessment.

It also seeks to utilise community groups and non-government organisations much earlier in the process. Their skills and expertise and, frankly, their different position in their communities can enlist the help of families as partners to stay committed to the wellbeing of their children. A statutory response from a government agency can sometimes do more damage than good – making use of community providers can often be a more positive alternative.

Differential response is an approach that is increasingly recognised internationally as best practice. Our version draws on the experience of others, and has been adapted to fit our local conditions and needs. One of the key benefits of this system is that children will be referred

## The new youth justice system did move away from the traditional welfare model

both appropriately and earlier to FGCs, and that the information and advice available will be more accurate and applicable to that particular family.

In a more general sense, it is time that the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act is reviewed. This government is committed to retaining the principles of the legislation but want to make sure the machinery of the legislation actively promotes those principles in a practical and workable manner. In particular, that FGCs continue to be promoted as the primary means by which decisions are made for children and young people who offend or who are at risk or in need.

The FGC has been adopted and adapted around the world as a best practice model. As a country New Zealand can be justifiably proud of this and the great social progress we continue to make. We must also make sure that we take this opportunity to listen to the experiences of others and apply the lessons learned. Whatever country or culture we're from, we all have specific circumstances and desires, but there are some universal needs and conditions for children and young people.

The FGC is a tool that can be adjusted to suit many different countries, but its success ultimately relies on the practical application of appropriate legislation, and careful and skilled administration by social workers, co-ordinators and others working in the social services sector. The successes we have achieved through the FGC are due almost entirely to the commitment and professionalism of care and protection co-ordinators, youth justice co-ordinators and social workers.

You can pay people to work, but you can't pay them to care. Regardless of the difficulties they face in their work every day, these workers show professionalism, commitment and that they really do care for the people they work with. They are truly kaitiaki of the FGC.

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### The FGC is a tool that can be adjusted to suit many different countries

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*Hon Ruth Dyson is an Associate Minister for Social Development and Employment, and the Minister responsible for Child, Youth and Family.*



# Learning from the past and repositioning the future

*Marie Connolly discusses the FGC in contemporary practice*

It has been said that this conference was a long time coming. This is true. Sometimes the best of things take time to mature. One of these may also be the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989, which is currently under review. The legislation that brought the family group conference (FGC) into law was introduced last century. It is now 17 years old and, despite its longevity, it continues to be one of the most innovative pieces of legislation that can be found in any jurisdiction. It is important that we look after it and make sure it continues to do what it was originally intended for – to empower families to look after their own children and to be the ones who decide what is best for them.

One of the first things the Ministry of Social Development did in reviewing the legislation was to bring together a group of people who shaped the ideas and brought the FGC into law – an

historians group, if you will. When we met with the historians group they shared with us how they felt when the legislation was introduced.

*There was a feeling of determination that the Department would actually lead the way in re-orientating itself ... from a mono-cultural department into a department that was there for Māori.*

They also talked about the concerns they had for children in care.

*Children were under state guardianship in quite large numbers and we were worried about children drifting in care. We needed to find a working basis with the families. In the long run, the social worker wasn't going to be there for the child. More and more people were intent on making sure that there was a concentration of family, and if there were strengths to build on, you needed to do that.*

They spoke about developing a new culture of practice, a culture that provided hope for families and for workers. They also talked about a broader vision and the legislative foundations that they put in place to encourage a different type of service delivery. They issued a challenge to us by asking why we do not have a network of service operating now as an alternative to the state.

We have the opportunity to see how we have responded to the historians' ambitious calls for change. Do we now have a service that is responsive to Māori interests? Has this legislation provided the means through which families, regardless of their ethnicity, have been empowered to make decisions that are in their best interests?

These ambitions were set in the last century. We are now in the 21st Century. Time and practice moves on. Practice, like everything else, evolves as we reshape and reinterpret our ideas toward the contemporary challenges we face. Practice now is different from 1989, when New Zealand so courageously introduced 'the new Act' as it was called for many years to come. In 1989 we were moving into new practice territory. Here is what a co-ordinator told me about their very first FGC back in 1989. It's a good example of a baptism of fire.

*[...] the conference proceeded and she continued to abuse us uphill and down-dale, which flustered both the social worker and I somewhat. Today it wouldn't one bit, but in those days it certainly did because we didn't know, sort of, where we were headed.*

While the historians may well have had a vision of how the legislation would work in practice,

anyone actually taking part in those early conferences will know that doing it with real families can present an unpredictable set of complex dynamics and sometimes unexpected outcomes.

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## Do we now have a service that is responsive to Māori interests?

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Now, almost two decades later, when I ask co-ordinators how they have seen practice develop over the years, they talk about greater practice maturity – moving from not quite knowing where they were heading to having:

- greater clarity about the aims and purpose of the FGC
- greater thoroughness in preparation
- greater clarity regarding 'bottom lines' (I will come back to this)
- more efficient processes regarding the organising of the FGC (I will also come back to this).

It may be that FGC practice in the 21st Century then is a little different from those early forays into family decision-making. What sense do we have of contemporary practice? How have the years shaped and moulded the way we work with children and families?

Over the past financial year to the middle of 2006 we held a total number of 15,477 FGCs in New Zealand. Over 9,000 of these conferences were youth justice FGCs, and we reached agreement around 79% of the time. In care and protection over the same period, we held more than 6,000 FGCs, almost 86% of which reached agreement.

When I talk to care and protection co-ordinators involved with modern day FGC practice, perhaps not surprisingly, they talk about the increased

complexity of the family troubles they confront. Creating an environment within which issues can be confronted honestly but with dignity is a key function of the FGC. In practice, fostering family-centred work on one hand and child protection on the other can become a delicate balance of responding to differing needs: family support and the need to maintain and preserve the family, and meeting the care and protection needs of the child. The tension between family support and child protection can be acutely felt within the FGC. Being upfront with families and talking honestly about the issues – although made more difficult in a meeting dominated by extended family – is important if the family is to make sound care and safety decisions. This is what a co-ordinator had to say about being upfront:

*I think the major thing I found is always tell them the truth, no matter how rough it might be, no matter how horrendous things might be, if you tell them the truth the family with work with you.*

For social workers though being upfront and telling “the truth” can also create stress and tension, which may have an impact on their actions. Here is another comment from a co-ordinator:

*I've got to say it's tremendously intimidating. I come to conferences and I'm sometimes sure that social workers avoid going to declaration because of the amount of effort and stress the work puts on them. It's their job, of course, but it's pretty tough.*

This raises a number of questions for us to consider: how does this kind of pressure impact on the way professionals practise in these situations, not only statutory professionals but

anybody involved with the family? Do these tense and difficult dynamics have the potential to undermine basic principles of family group conferencing?

Equally, professional decision making can creep into what was originally thought of as a family decision-making process. Co-ordinators have sometimes expressed concern to me about the potential for a professional pre-judgement of a conference:

*It means that quite often it's a process that's gone through in order to get it to court. We're going to conference in order to get this outcome. ... the families feel very disempowered, and often voice that: 'What have you got us all here for – you've already decided what will happen?'*

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The 1989  
legislation  
was a radical  
shift  
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There are a number of things that swing the process either toward or away from a family-led practice within an FGC. Increasingly risk averse practices can shift the pendulum toward professional decision-making even within a family-led set

of legal principles. In New Zealand over the past 15 years, increasingly high community expectations that social workers must protect all children and never miss a single case of abuse has, I believe, driven practice toward increasingly forensic investigations that have influenced the nature and style of the FGC process in this country. To understand pendulum shifts in practice over time, it is useful for us to look at the ways in which practice has developed in New Zealand.

Before the introduction of FGCs, New Zealand generally followed international child welfare service delivery systems. In the 1960s and 1970s New Zealand built an infrastructure of

alternative care – foster care and residential care – to provide for the needs of children who could not be cared for at home. The Children and Young Persons Act of 1974 generally supported a benign child rescue model of practice. Indeed, social workers did rescue children in reasonably large numbers and placed them in care situations often for long periods of time. In many ways this imitated the practices of other English-speaking systems of child welfare. The 1989 legislation was a radical shift away from this approach with its greater family participation in decision-making and inclusion of strongly held cultural belief systems. It was an occasion when we looked to ourselves and based practice on what we thought was right for children and families in this country. The battle of practice between ‘child rescue’ and ‘family support’ had been won by the family-centred practice lobby. At least that is how it seemed in 1989.

As it turned out it was only a skirmish. The 1990s brought new practice development struggles.

Internationally we were seeing practice that was strongly influenced by systems of risk assessment, and an increased bureaucratisation of child protection. Perhaps paradoxically these practices found a sympathetic place within a new managerialism aimed at controlling, prescribing and making certain that which is fundamentally uncertain – the practice of child protection. The kind of family-led practice that was introduced by the 1989 legislation struggled to co-exist with an increasingly forensic child protection orientation. Despite our family-led legislation, social workers found themselves involved in adversarial investigative processes which, in turn, had an effect on the dynamics and style of the FGC.

Over time it is perhaps inevitable that elements of our practice will shift along a continuum from family-led practice to more professionally determined ways of working, as shown in figure 1. Using a continuum such as this can help us see where practice shifts occur:

**Figure 1: A practice continuum**



Because practice responds to circumstance, it would be unlikely for practice to be constantly and fully up one end or the other. The legislation we have in this country places us more firmly along the family-centred end of the continuum with its emphasis on family-led decision-making and family solution-focused processes. The professionally-driven end of the continuum perhaps best represents elements of traditional practice where professionals dominate decision-making and professionals dominate the development of practice solutions. Toward this end, we would see a much greater reliance on alternative systems of care for children as opposed to family-based care solutions. In between we are likely to see practice more or less influenced by the two extremes. Essentially, family-centred practice may have professionally-driven elements. For example, processes may have greater professional involvement at critical decision-making times. Equally professionally-driven practice may be more or less infused by family-centred elements. Here professionals may be the ones who decide who in the family will be involved, and where and when conferences take place.

Practice can shift along this continuum and families can get more or less of a family-centred response. Professional processes have the power to influence practice along this continuum. Coming in with rigid bottom lines can stymie family-led, decision-making processes. Having your ducks in a row and being ready for court can pre-determine the decision-making process and can render family irrelevant to the process. Changes in practice, which are likely to happen as practice becomes mainstream, can also cause drift along the continuum. It is clear that the

practicalities of bringing people together, and also issues of safety, influence how co-ordinators go about convening a conference.

There is a lot of downtime during private family time for professionals out at a community venue. Workers can catch up on their phone calls when conferences are held back at the office. Such changes in practice, while making every bit of sense in terms of better efficiency and maximising social worker effort, can nevertheless impact on the participants' perception of the locus of control. Even when workers identify strongly with family-led practice, they may find that drift occurs almost imperceptibly and is affected by a range of contributing factors that may be within or outside their control.

While these may seem small points in the overall scheme of things, gathered together they can get us into trouble if they cause our practice to slide consistently toward the professionally-driven end of this spectrum.

So where does this all take us when we think about practice in the 21st Century? How do

we mould and shape practice in response to the contemporary needs of children and families?

Having an outcome orientation requires that we think about the future of this child and how we may contribute to his or her longer term outcomes. It is no longer good enough that we just secure safety on the day. Of course safety is important, but we need to think about supporting our children to be healthy and thriving members of a society that they feel valued and connected to. We need to be sure that we are supporting safety and belonging for children. We need to be supporting parents to be the best parents they can be and we also need to support staff to do the kind of work

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### Coming in with rigid bottom lines can stymie family-led, decision-making processes

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that ultimately promotes good outcomes. We need to build knowledge into our practice about what works for children. In the future when the children whose lives we have touched ask us why we did what we did, we need to be able to explain what influenced our practice. We need to be able to use knowledge to develop practices that promote good outcomes for children.

It seems to me that the decade of the 1990s was very much the era of family assessment. A huge amount of social work effort has gone into investigating and assessing families within child welfare. This has been the case across jurisdictions. Assessments of themselves, however, contribute relatively little to children's outcomes. They are important in helping us to identify the best services at the right time. But they can never be an end in themselves. It is what happens next that is of greatest importance to good outcomes for children. Yet this part of the work – changing family systems and changing behaviour – is probably the hardest work to do. Improving the life chances for children is hard work and progress can be slow, but it is where we need to maximise our efforts and improve our skills. Being responsive to families within the contemporary environment is a much more complex task than it used to be.

The next decade will require us to increase our responsiveness within a changing environment. Practice will always need to change and evolve as it confronts contemporary needs. Migrant populations will change the face of our work into the future. We are already experiencing much more complex family systems with multiple maternal and paternal parenting and

step-parenting arrangements. Within this mix we have family violence across generations and between sub-sections of the family system. These dynamics require high levels of professional skill and practice frameworks that can help us to protect vulnerable people within the context of FGC practice. Looking to the future requires that we also consider how our systems respond to changing needs. For example, does our care system respond to the needs of children and families within the contemporary environment? If we were to start afresh would we build the system we have? We need to understand our work and plan for the kind of systems we need.

As soon as we adopt an outcomes focus we begin to understand the importance of forging and sustaining effective partnerships. No one agency can provide the kind of responses needed in today's contemporary child welfare environment. A wide array of partnerships are required that can respond to need across the spectrum – from early intervention through to more specialist and intensive responses. Using a life course perspective to strategically build services across the sector requires more than just support services for families. It requires services for young people who will become tomorrow's parents. It requires specialist services for young people and adults who need to address drug and alcohol problems, mental health issues, and family violence. It requires nurturing environments that families choose to seek help from. Essentially it requires a model of welfare across the universal, targeted and specialist spectrum of services. Research clearly shows that intervening early in the life of a child brings the best long-term results. Early intervention helps children to do better socially and

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educationally, and can reduce violence within the family over the long term. The strengthening and integration of services across the spectrum is more likely to ensure that the right services are provided at the optimum time in the life of a family. Building the sector strategically shifts us from ad hoc development toward a more integrated approach that prioritises services across the universal, targeted and specialist continuum. Using a life course framework to guide sector development will also help us to identify where gaps exist and where services need to be developed.

Although we talk a good deal about working together and supporting holistic services for children and families, we have a little way to go. Unless we can mobilise and sustain effective partnerships and share responsibility for child and family outcomes, we will struggle to provide the wraparound service potential that is so important to addressing the needs of children and families.

In the end it is important that we realise that professional beliefs are incredibly influential in determining the nature and centrality of family-centred practice. For some professionals there is a tension between fostering family-led practice and supporting a children's rights perspective. Over the next decade children's rights are likely to be at the forefront of professional and community concern. For some professionals this will exacerbate the tension. Sometimes it is assumed that a focus on children's rights, voices and participation is aligned with professionally led or 'child rescue' orientations. This does not need to be the case. Integrating child-centredness within family-centred practice has the capacity to avoid simple binary positions that hinder us from supporting families to take the lead as child advocates. In the end it is likely that families themselves will be the best

guardians of children's rights. Engaging children more actively in the processes of the work has the potential to strengthen family-centred practice overall.

Although born of the 20th Century and built on ever more ancient wisdom, our FGC is nevertheless a very modern practice. It is up there at the cutting edge of family-centred practice, and we can move forward with confidence into the next decades with a practice that has well and truly stood the test of time. We can embrace it as we confront the challenges of the new century. For in the end, practiced with integrity, the FGC will continue to support our families into the future. It will continue to provide hope and will continue to be a very modern practice.



*Dr Marie Connolly is the Chief Social Worker at the Ministry of Social Development.*



# Family decision making now and in the future

*Stewart Bartlett examines the evolution of the family group conference*

Approximately 2,500 years ago Sophocles said, “My son, may you be happier than your father.”

The name of Sophocle’s son has not been passed down to us. It could have been Sione or Thomas or Mahi, but more likely it was Athenian like Ptolemy or Plato or maybe Brad. Nonetheless his sentiments are timeless and international.

Sophocles wishes were given a practical vehicle with the enactment of the Child, Young Persons, and Their Families Act (the CYPF Act) on 27 May 1989 and later the statutory creation of the family group conference (FGC).

For many families whose children’s wellbeing is severely marginalised or whose young people are committing crimes, the FGC has become the means by which they have a real and genuine opportunity to prevent their children from sliding into a lifetime of unhappiness and

permanent eclipse. The premise behind much of the discourse which follows is two fold.

1. The public interest requires that children and young people are, whenever possible, given the opportunity to grown into adults who are free from the ongoing depredations of a childhood lived in the shadow of abuse, neglect and crime.
2. The people with the greatest motivation to lead children to a better future are their families, and therefore in all circumstance those families should have the maximum opportunity to determine the course of their children’s’ future.



The 1980s produced staggering reforms in the New Zealand economy, political and social life



For much of the 20th Century, New Zealand governments adopted a paternal and welfarist position in respect of all its citizens. The Child Welfare Act 1925 operated for 49 years; it embodied the alternative position that government is best placed, to the exclusion of all others, to deal with marginalised children and young persons.

As any historian and indeed any Kiwi alive at the time will tell you, the 1980s produced staggering reforms in the New Zealand economy, political and social life. As David Lange rather memorably put it, New Zealand was being run like a Polish shipyard.

The CYPF Act might be seen, at first blush, as epitomising the social aspect of the deregulation occurring at the time, emphasising as it does the devolvement of decision-making from the state to family-led arrangements. This Act was the product of a government listening carefully to the people most affected by existing social services legislation and practice. And having listened, government borrowed heavily from indigenous Māori culture to produce a radical new means of decision-making for children, young people and families not only from Māori but from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

These are auspicious beginnings for the FGC and will always bear repeating especially in those moments and times when we occasionally forget where we have come from. There are two important points to make. Māori had a clear view about how decision-making should take place in respect of their tamariki and mokopuna. The government of the day had the wisdom and the courage to adopt a new model based on that clear view, and saw that all New Zealanders could benefit from the application of that model.

Since 1989, close to 200,000 FGCs have been held, involving the active participation of around one million New Zealanders. These are serious volumes of activity. Whatever might be read into those figures one thing is crystal clear – the FGC is not a minority boutique institution; it is a core part of the machinery of government, the engine-room of decision-making for child welfare and youth justice.

No court can deal with a child welfare issue on a young offender without considering the recommendations of a FGC. Her Majesty's judges deserve our thanks and much kudos for embracing the model with alacrity and enthusiasm. From time to time we must also acknowledge their role as a sort of externalised conscience and ensure that we do not flag in our commitment to family decision making.

I want to look forward a little into the future – and consider the situation in around 100 years time. What is it that we should be expecting from the FGC for our great-great-great grandchildren?

From my point of view, first and foremost I want it to exist. I want it to be the entrenched and pivoted legal means of decision-making, not only in child protection and youth justice, but hopefully in many other areas.

I want its core essence to remain and in that sense to be recognisable as a direct descendant of the FGC today. Unmistakeably families will be making effective and sustainable decision which are supported by flexible and meaningful government and community input.

It must continue to serve not only the interest of children and their families, but also the public interest. While its core essence must remain immutable, it must exist within systems which have sufficient pliability to react to the changing mores of the time. One needs only to look back at the last 100 years and view the changes in society and the changing nature of the institutions which serve it. The courts are, I think, an excellent example in this regard. We all have an extraordinary journey ahead of us, and so does the FGC.

It must continue to be underpinned by legislation first and foremost – it should not

be relegated to a creature of optional policy. It must be sufficiently part of the fabric of our society that solutions are thought of only ever through the machinery of the FGC not by alternatives being set up in place of the FGC.

We are presently shepherding our wee bairn through its mid-adolescence. As we all know this can be an uncertain and hazardous task. It is our job to maintain its credibility in this its youth, in order that it can secure its position in our society. It has already done well to get this far, as it spent its childhood in the 1900s, which were not necessarily an easy time for child protection or youth justice services, but great institutions are generally born in difficult times.

Today there is no doubt about the nature of government support for the FGC. This does not absolve those of us working closely with the FGC to keep looking at ways of improving its use and enhancing its credibility. I think I can say without contradiction that there is a generally accepted need to have care and protection matters referred earlier than they are at present. We will strive to set up systems and environments in which referral to FGC takes place as early as is reasonably and legally possible. Holding off referrals cuts down the family's options and has the somewhat sad potential of making FGCs nothing more than conduits for children to state care.

There is also a need to have co-ordinators move closer to the communities that they may serve. This is one of the driving forces behind significant changes presently being made in the youth justice services in Child, Youth and Family, and this holds enormous potential.

There are some other things we have to do, but this is a celebration of the FGC and when one celebrates adolescent achievement, it is poor form, in my view, to be too enthusiastic in picking over minor shortcomings.

So let us celebrate. Let us congratulate Māoridom for giving a gift to all New Zealanders and then to the world. Let us acknowledge the government which had the ticker to take this forward. And absolutely let us congratulate the professionals who have had the vision to make it work for New Zealand's children, families and victims of offences – social workers, police officers, judges, lawyers and most of all our care and protection and youth justice co-ordinators.

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Today there is no  
doubt about the nature  
of government support  
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# Youth justice social work

*Marie Connolly on developing frameworks to support practice with young people at risk*

## **Introduction**

Building practice on a solid foundation of research evidence about what works in child welfare has become a key priority for social service providers in recent years. The push toward evidence-based practice has provided something of a conundrum in the youth justice area where research evidence for effective interventions has been identified as equivocal at best (Prior, 2005). Evidence-based practice in youth justice over time has had a somewhat bumpy ride with assertive shifts from “nothing works” to “what works” and a variety of ideological positions in between (Pitts, 2004). According to Pitts ‘the challenge for ... youth justice is to resist the temptation to embrace the next, simplistic, “one-size-fits-all”, “evidence-based” concoction and in dialogue with professionals, practitioners, theorists and researchers embark upon a process of collaborative theory-building’.

Developing practice frameworks built on multiple sources of knowledge has been identified as an important means of improving practice quality in systems of child welfare internationally (Connolly, 2006; Gilgun, 2005;

Healy, 2005; Shlonsky & Wagner, 2005). Social workers need to draw on a wide range of knowledge and look further than what is available through empirical research (Gilgun, 2005). For example, an experienced social worker’s repertoire will also include knowledge that is relevant to a particular client situation – theories, professional knowledge and experience, understanding of the client system, contextual beliefs, values and notions of best practice. Writers supporting the development of practice frameworks that capture this broader knowledge set argue that they have the potential to transform formal and informal sources of knowledge into practical ways of working, creating ‘unique responses ... in practice encounters’ (Healy, 2005).

Recently the New Zealand child welfare system has developed a practice framework that draws together multiple sources of knowledge to guide interventions with children, young people and families in the care and protection area (Connolly, 2006). Designed as a tool for practitioners, the care and protection framework has been defined as “a conceptual map that brings together, in an accessible

design, the organisation's approach to social work practice" (Connolly, 2006). Articulating the links between knowledge, practice and outcomes, the care and protection practice framework integrates three perspectives drawn from the literature: child-centred; family-led and culturally responsive; and strengths- and evidence-based. These practice strands are then woven through the phases of the work through a set of practice triggers that are linked to the knowledge and evidence base. Building on this work, and using the enduring themes of what works with young people who offend, a further framework has been developed to guide practice in the area of youth justice.

### ***The New Zealand youth justice practice framework***

Like the care and protection initiative, we wanted the framework to provide foundation stones for practice, linking knowledge, interventions and outcomes. In New Zealand the desired outcomes for youth justice work are identified broadly: to reduce the rate and severity of child and youth re-offending; to hold young people to account for offending and to restore or improve the wellbeing of the young person. We wanted the framework to respond directly to these outcomes using a knowledge base that could both inform higher level principles and resonate with the realities of practice. It was considered important that the framework was a useful and readily accessible tool for youth justice practitioners, regardless of experience or qualification.

The framework was also based on a number of assumptions.

1. That evidence supporting practice emerges from a range of knowledge sources, including formal and tacit knowledge. Formal sources of knowledge include research and best practice literature. Tacit knowledge includes

practice wisdom "built up from repeated exposure to practice situations" (Healy, 2005). In this regard the framework is underpinned by a broad knowledge base, while also encouraging opportunities for reflective and reflexive practice.

2. Connected to the above is the assumption that social work is also a values-based profession (Ronnau, 2001), practice being rooted in a core set of values that provide purpose, meaning and direction to the work (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993). As such, to more fully engage practitioners, values that are fundamental to practice needed to be visible within the framework – for example, principles of non discrimination, democracy and human rights, client participation, and integrity.
3. Practice develops in response to unique social and cultural conditions, so it was considered important that the framework resonate with cultural belief systems and be responsive to an increasingly diverse society. In addition, the framework needed to relate to the key principles of youth justice work in New Zealand and in particular reinforcing the importance of responsibility, accountability, and responsiveness to victims.
4. While research findings have been somewhat equivocal in terms of youth justice there have been enduring themes relating to what works with young people who offend. The framework uses this research, but recognises the need for continual appraisal of the framework as new knowledge is developed (Gilgun, 2005). In this sense the model is approached 'with a spirit of critical reflection and learning ... in response to local needs and circumstances' (Prior, 2005).

There are three phases within the New Zealand youth justice social work process. The first involves the engagement and assessment of the young person and those involved in the situation. In the event of an alleged offence, the New Zealand Police refers the young person to a youth justice co-ordinator who then convenes a family group conference (FGC). This represents the beginning of the seeking solutions phase

of the work. The FGC is a meeting that brings together the young person, his or her extended family, the victim(s) of the offences committed by the young person and the professionals involved. A restorative justice process, the FGC provides the key mechanism through which young people can be diverted from the court system. It is also considered a key means through which positive outcomes can be provided for young people who offend. Indeed, in the most comprehensive and significant research to date, there has been the suggestion that the utilisation of the FGC in the area of youth justice has the capacity to contribute to reduced levels of reoffending and provide more effective reintegration of the young person into the community (Maxwell, Robertson, Kingi, Morris & Cunningham, 2004).

The FGC is a meeting that is solution-focused and designed to hold the young people accountable for their actions, while at the same time providing support to all those involved in the process. The aim is to establish responsibility and arrive at a set of agreed plans to address the young person's offending. The law requires that all participants of the FGC agree to the plans, and in the vast majority agreement is reached. In the event of non-agreement there is recourse to the Youth Court. However, significant effort

is made to reach solutions and thus divert the young person from the youth court system. Like other diversionary youth justice systems, New Zealand's approach reflects a view that delinquency is transient for most young people (Whyte, 2004). Within the New Zealand youth justice system, 60% of the young people who are referred for a youth justice FGC have no further involvement with the youth justice system. A further 20% experience two to three further FGCs and then do not reappear. The remaining 20% represent the repeat offenders who move through the Youth Court system.

The third phase of the youth justice social work process is referred to as enhancing wellbeing and changing behaviour. This phase involves supporting the young person and their family to give effect to the plans developed in the FGC.

Drawn from the literature, four strands or perspectives form the basis of the youth justice framework: justice and accountability; young person-focused; family-led and cultural responsive; and strengths- and evidence-based. The cultural metaphor used to illustrate the integration of these ideas is the kete, representing in this context a basket of knowledge, weaving together strands of quality practice through the phases of our work:



**Figure 1:**  
*The youth justice practice framework*

### *The components of the youth justice practice framework*

The first strand of the framework, justice and accountability focus, responds to the principle of holding young people to account for offending behaviour. It recognises that youth justice is concerned with the rights and needs of a wide group of stakeholders, including but not restricted to the young person themselves. Restorative justice processes rest at the heart of the justice and accountability perspective, such practices being seen to offer opportunities for common understanding of the harm caused by offending, and agreement on how best to make amends (Walgrave, 2004). The restorative process has the capacity to “lead to satisfaction of the victim, reintegration of the offender, and restored assurance of rights and freedoms in society” (Walgrave, 2004). Although not widely adopted as a practice in Western youth justice systems, restorative justice values strongly influence practice in New Zealand. This country’s law requires that young people be held accountable for their offending, and importantly, also be provided opportunities to develop non-offending pathways. The involvement of the victim is key to this process and research has suggested the need to ensure that the victim is well-prepared for the FGC and is responded to respectfully throughout the process (Maxwell et al, 2004). Maxwell and her colleagues also argue the need to manage the dynamics of the FGC carefully, ensuring that people do not feel alienated and that the process is balanced constructively to repair the harm. The need to ensure that professionals do not dominate the FGC process is also considered to be critical. Trouble arises when professionals debate and modify the plan, lessening the involvement of the young people, their family and the victims.

The swift administration of justice is also identified as a key priority for youth justice

services to ensure that young people experience more immediately the consequences of their actions. The removal of young people from their families is considered an option of last resort.

The second strand of the framework, the young person-focused perspective, is embedded in a rights-based orientation and is supported by research and literature that informs this perspective. The work of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) is central to this approach, and in particular, its underpinning theme relating to the right of young people to special care and the right to provision, protection and participation. The ‘Beijing Rules’ further dictate that young people who offend should also have their needs met, age and vulnerability being a mitigating factor, and that attention be paid to the rights of the young person.

Research indicates that children and young people clearly have the capacity to participate in decisions that affect them, and the right to be listened to (Lipscomb, 2003; Littlechild, 2000). In this regard, research that has been undertaken with young people themselves identified a number of key factors for effective youth justice work (Barry, 2005):

- talking and listening to young people
- building relationships
- praising the young person rather than blaming
- focusing on the future rather than the past
- being aware of and taking into account background problems
- offering practical help.

Youth justice systems that respond to the young person’s specific needs, including their developmental needs, are likely to have positive outcomes in the longer term. The 80% success rate provided by the youth justice FGC system

in New Zealand provides some confidence that diverting young people from court systems is more likely to result in them growing out of their offending, rather than growing into it (Doolan, 1988). Such responses are sensitive to how young people develop. Keeping young people out of the court system for as long as possible can provide them with the time they need to move through transient phases of offending behaviour. Many young people move through developmental transitions smoothly and over time acquire adult capacities for reason, responsibility and commitment (Butts, Mayer & Ruth, 2005). They further argue that this requires that young people have access to particular developmental assets including 'skills and experiences in the physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional and social areas. Every community has a duty to ensure that young people have access to these assets' (Butts et al, 2005).

Enhancing wellbeing for young people includes the need to promote reintegrative and rehabilitative options for young people, including the provision of appropriate mental health services and making arrangements for education, training or employment (Maxwell et al, 2004).

Young people who move on to the Youth Court system also require access to these assets offered by the community. In this regard the need for co-ordinated systemic responses to advocacy and support become particularly important. Within the New Zealand context the social worker has statutory responsibility for supporting the Youth Court in providing interventions for young offenders. To provide the necessary advocacy role in this context

requires in depth knowledge of the law and the services available to support young people.

The third strand of the framework reinforces the need for practice to be family-led and culturally responsive. Emphasis on collective responsibility for young people and the centrality of the family is a key practice principle in New Zealand's system of child welfare. Youth accountability is fostered in the context of family support and the strengthening of family. In this regard New Zealand's youth justice legislation, through

the mechanism of the FGC, encourages family-centred practice where family, including extended family and kin networks, can be seen as practice partners.

Ryan and Yang argue that 'families are critical to understanding and interrupting patterns of

delinquent and criminal behaviour' (2005). In recent years mobilising the strengths of the family in youth justice has been utilised in a number of different practice models. For example, the development of multiple family group interventions has been identified as way of supporting youth at risk (Quinn, 2004). Within this perspective the family is seen as providing a context for the resolution of problems, but unlike the New Zealand FGC that brings together extended family members, the multiple family group models brings together different families experiencing similar problems. Such groups 'derive[s] ideas, cognitive frames and prescriptions for behaviour changes' (Quinn, 2004). Like other interventions that focus on parenting they aim to 'change the ways in which antisocial behaviour is reinforced and maintained within the family environment' (Kurtz, 2002, p.687). In essence then, they focus

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Co-ordinated systemic responses to advocacy and support become particularly important

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on behaviour change within the family so that they can strengthen parental supervision and learn ways of providing reinforcement for pro-social behaviour.

It has also been suggested that building alliances with communities, including cultural communities are more likely to strengthen good outcomes for young people who offend. In many countries youths from minority groups are over represented in youth offending statistics. Research also indicates that the special needs of excluded young people from multi-cultural communities have been ignored in the past. While research into the effectiveness of culturally sensitive programmes is underdeveloped, it is possible that such programmes may better engage young people from ethnic minority groups. In this regard it is extremely important that strong partnerships are initiated with cultural systems and organisations to develop provider capability and assist in improving outcomes for young people.

In the context of cross-cultural issues in FGC practice, some research highlights the need to ensure that processes move beyond tokenistic involvement of families and ensure that participants 'feel validated and crucial to the process rather than merely provided with an opportunity to participate ... left to take charge of the decisions rather than have professionals suggest or make decisions for them [and] ... be spoken to in a language they understood by people who could respond to them in ways that were affirming and respectful' (Maxwell et al, 2004).

The fourth strand in the youth justice framework responds to the need for strengths- and evidence-based practice. Although the evidence base for youth justice practice is equivocal in terms of what works, there are a number of factors that have been identified as impacting on good outcomes for young people. These include:

- intervening early as a means of preventing reoffending
- strengthening positive relationships both within the family and school environment
- adopting diversionary strategies to avoid court appearances
- utilising constructive FGC processes
- responding to the young person's treatment and service needs (drug and alcohol, educational failure, disconnection from employment opportunities etc).

(Maxwell et al, 2004)

In addition, writers have reinforced the importance of working specifically with the young person and their family to strengthen parental supervision, encourage pro-social values, foster attachment bonds, build the young person's network of friends/peers outside the delinquency group, and strengthen the young person's personal and social skills.

These approaches constitute community-based responses in which multi-model treatment efforts are applied. Although not yet fully tested, writers have argued that a most promising approach in this regard is Multi Systemic Therapy (Tate & Redding, 2005). MST is an intensive family-based approach designed to strengthen parental discipline and practice, improve family relations, develop family and community support networks, including decreasing the young person's connections with anti-social peer groups, and develop the young person's pro-social activity involvement (Tate & Redding, 2005; Ryan & Yang, 2005). Mentoring has also been identified as an important component of youth justice work, in addition, to building mastery, and instilling a sense of hope for the young person and his or her family (Samuelson & Robertson, 2002).

In essence this research supports strengths-based and resilience-focused approaches. Supporting families, building on strengths and

working collaboratively have been identified as guiding principles in the promotion of co-ordinated and integrated youth justice systems (Tuell, 2003). The strengths approach is also fundamental to the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework. Emerging from the extensive contribution made by adolescent development research over many years, PYD is underpinned by three broad assumptions.

1. Focus on strengths and assets rather than deficits and problems.
2. Strengths and assets are usually acquired through positive relationships, especially with pro-social and caring adults.
3. The development and acquisition of youth assets occurs in multiple contexts and environments.

(Butts et al, 2005)

While PYD has a focus on strengthening family systems surrounding the young person, it moves beyond the family by identifying youth development opportunities across the young person's broader environment, including schools, employment networks, and community neighbourhoods. Using PYD within a youth justice framework has the potential to 'encourage youth to capitalize on their strengths, develop new pro-social competencies, and connect to educational, employment, civic, and cultural opportunities that help them to avoid problematic behaviour and better negotiate the transition from adolescence to early adulthood' (Butts et al, 2005).

This broader, more holistic response to practice has influenced the development of the New Zealand youth justice practice framework. Shifting from the notion of one size fits all the practice framework assumes that no one strand is enough to provide quality practice in the youth justice area. While New Zealand practice emphasises justice and accountability,

it also reinforces the need to be responsive to the young person and their unique family and cultural environment. At the same time there is a need for practice to have a strong knowledge base and to be informed by evidence. It is the weaving together of the perspectives through the phases of the work that makes practice strong. Practice triggers provide the mechanism through which the strands of the framework (justice and responsibility; young person-focused; family-led and culturally responsive; strengths- and evidence-based) are woven through the phases of the work. The practice triggers are derived from, and give support to this youth justice knowledge base.

### *Practice triggers within the youth justice framework*

Each phase of the work has a set of practice triggers. The triggers remind practitioners of the links between knowledge and practice. For example, in the engagement and assessment phase a practitioner will be reminded of the need for victim engagement through the justice- and accountability-focused practice trigger: 'has the victim been well-prepared for the FGC?' In the seeking solutions phase the practitioner will be reminded of the need to fully involve the young person through the young person-focused practice trigger: 'has the young person been actively involved in decision-making processes?' In the changing behaviour and enhancing wellbeing phase the practitioner will be reminded of the need to work with the family system through the family-led and culturally responsive practice trigger: 'are we working on parental discipline and the reinforcement of pro-social values?' Supporting the belief that no one strand is enough, the practice framework weaves together the perspectives and the practice triggers throughout the phases of the work to strengthen practice overall.

## 1. The 'Engagement and Assessment' Practice Triggers

The practice triggers throughout the engagement and assessment phase of the youth justice process focus social work effort toward ensuring that all those affected by the young person's offending behaviour are involved in the process of restorative justice. This includes the young person, the family (including extended family and kinship group), the victim of the alleged crime, and the relevant professionals.

Practice triggers in this phase reinforce the need to engender a sense of hope that the problems

can be overcome and that the young person and the family can be active in the process of promoting non-offending pathways. Engagement of the victim during this phase is particularly important since their involvement is essential to the restorative justice process.

## 2. The 'Seeking Solutions' Practice Triggers

The second phase of the New Zealand youth justice process focuses specifically on the FGC. Practice triggers reinforce the need for people to be well prepared for the meeting, and that the process reflects the principles of fairness and justice.

**Figure 2: Engagement and Assessment Practice Triggers**

<p><b>Justice and Accountability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the victim well prepared for the FGC and respectfully engaged with the process?</li> <li>Does everyone understand their rights and responsibilities?</li> <li>Is the young person encouraged to take responsibility for their actions, decisions and consequences?</li> <li>Have all alternatives for dealing with the young person's offending been considered?</li> <li>Is Youth Court being appropriately used to reinforce accountability?</li> <li>Does the young person have a legal advocate?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the victim well prepared for the FGC and respectfully engaged with the process?</li> <li>Does everyone understand their rights and responsibilities?</li> <li>Is the young person encouraged to take responsibility for their actions, decisions and consequences?</li> <li>Have all alternatives for dealing with the young person's offending been considered?</li> <li>Is Youth Court being appropriately used to reinforce accountability?</li> <li>Does the young person have a legal advocate?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Young person-focused</b></p>	
<p><b>Family-led and culturally responsive</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is all contact respectful and fully informative in ways/language they can understand?</li> <li>Does the family understand their rights and responsibilities?</li> <li>Is the family fully involved in the planning of the FGC?</li> <li>Is the worker able to mobilise extended family support for the young person?</li> <li>Are the interests of family members being considered and cultural networks explored?</li> <li>Are the cultural needs of the family being responded to?</li> <li>Has the worker persevered with engaging the family even when resistance is encountered (particularly important when the young person has had a number of FGCs)?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the worker clear and transparent about their role and power in the process?</li> <li>Have we assessed the underlying issues that may be impacting on the young person's offending?</li> <li>Have we assessed any potential risk-taking behaviour and addressed immediate safety?</li> <li>Is the family seen as a resource for the young person to bring about change?</li> <li>Do we understand the young person's connections, including peer group, education, health issues etc?</li> <li>Are professional systems working together to support the young person and the family?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strengths-&amp; evidence-based</b></p>	

Finding solutions within this phase depends significantly on the capacity of the participants to work together toward a restorative justice process. Participants need to be supported throughout, and solutions need to make sense to all those involved. The young person taking ownership of the solutions and family support for the plan is often critical to successful outcomes with respect to the FGC.

### 3. The Changing Behaviour and Enhancing Wellbeing Practice Triggers

In the event of the FGC reaching agreement, the final phase of the youth justice process focuses on the implementation of the FGC plan. This includes the monitoring and review of decisions and plans, and the changing of offending patterns of behaviour.

If the FGC fails to reach agreement and/or the young person is required to go to court, the triggers reinforce the need for quality services to the court, support for the young person and their family, and all those involved in the court process.

### **Conclusions**

The practice framework provides a means through which knowledge, research and practice can be interrelated to support positive outcomes for young people in the youth justice area. In developing the youth justice practice framework the New Zealand child welfare system is refocusing its attention on social work practice and supporting the values, principles and knowledge that are considered important to the work. Youth justice social workers have embraced the framework, in part because it speaks the language of the profession and signals a commitment to the return of professional values within the youth justice system. It also pulls together new research and long-standing

best practice ideas in a way that is readily accessible and makes sense to people working in the field.

A set of resources has been developed for staff to integrate the framework into practice. Each staff member involved in youth justice practice has been provided with their own kete in which they will find the resources they need to know and understand the framework and its knowledge base. Posters provide visual reminders of the perspectives and triggers, and readily accessible resource papers provide the research and practice literature. The kete has, in effect, become the practitioners 'basket of knowledge'. In addition, training has been provided for all existing staff, and practice framework modules have been introduced into induction training for new staff. Supervisors are also encouraged to use the framework, and in particular the practice triggers, during staff supervision.

The youth justice practice framework has been grounded in the realities of practice, supported by a strong knowledge base and embedded in a set of principles and values that are important to the work with at-risk young people. As a concept it provides a transparent understanding of what is considered important to the work, and how this informs practice interventions with young people and their families. As a tool for youth justice staff it provides an informed intervention logic and a set of triggers to support best practice.

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# Book reviews

## ***Talking about Domestic Abuse***

By Cathy Humphreys, Ravi K Thiara, Agnes Skamballis and Audrey Mullender  
Published in 2006 by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London  
ISBN 1-84310-423-7  
RRP Not available

*Reviewed by Karen Steele*

*Talking about Domestic Abuse* is a photo-activity workbook to develop communication between mothers and young people. *Talking to My Mum*, which is written by the same authors but is for younger children, was reviewed in the December 2006 issue of *Social Work Now*.

This series was created following growing concern about abused women and their children living in refuges. Historically, refuges were set up to help women who wanted to escape their partner's violence and, from the very beginning, women brought their children with them. To help these children, the Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge has created a practical programme of action, which is designed to build good communication between mothers and children who have lived with domestic violence.

The activities have been developed with the assistance of mothers, young people and children, as well as workers from refuge outreach services and community-based programmes. Most activities are about spending quality time together, helping to build self-esteem in young people, learning to talk about

feelings, and developing communication and understanding between mothers and their children. Some of the activities focus on relaxing and having fun together, and others work on improving communication for all mothers and young people, not only those who have been through domestic abuse.

This is a highly visual resource, and has many activities that are helpful for mothers and young people for whom reading does not come easily, or who may not have English as their first language. It is worth noting that they would still require a support person to help get through the activities.

The workbook is divided into three sections.

1. Early Days – activities for getting started and to address any recent changes in living arrangements.
2. Talking about things that matter – activities for opening up and identifying talking points.
3. Moving on – activities for leaving (such as leaving the refuge), finishing a group or moving to a new place.

The workbook features everyday activities that most mothers and young people can do together with pencils and paper. The activity sheets can be photocopied or the workbook can be written and drawn on as needed. The writers have kept in mind that some refuges do not have computers readily available.

Issues that are relevant to professionals working with domestic abuse have been highlighted by the research carried out for this series. Workers,

including social workers, refuge workers, counsellors, psychologists and family therapists, will find the activities useful when working with mothers and their children.

I have no hesitation in recommending this book to mothers and children that I meet in the course of my practice, whether or not they are from situations of abuse.

*Talking about Domestic Abuse* is published in the UK and US, with links and services to Canada and Australia. It can certainly be effective for use in New Zealand.

*Karen Steele* is a senior practitioner, *Child, Youth and Family, Whangarei*.

## ***Working with Gangs and Young People: A toolkit for resolving group conflict***

By Jessie Feinstein and Nia Imani Kuumba  
Published in 2006 by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London  
ISBN 1-84310-447-4  
RRP NZ \$92.00

*Reviewed by Kim Boyd*

Youth offending, youth violence and youth gangs are international concerns and *Working with Gangs and Young People* outlines a comprehensive programme to engage and challenge youth behaviour in a group/gang environment, including giving the individual the positive means of dealing with conflict. The authors have a lot of experience in conflict resolution and have both worked on the Leap's Gangs and Territorialism Programme, which provides opportunities for young people and adults to explore creative approaches to conflict. Jessie Feinstein has worked with young people in the US and UK since 1994, including

young people with gang affiliations in custody. Nia Imani Kuumba has worked with young people in the Caribbean, Europe and the US since 1984, and is a senior trainer in conflict resolution.

This workshop manual follows a three-year research project in the UK, which was the result of a seminar that identified a lack of both resources and innovative models for dealing with gang activity. The authors' intention was to help professionals working with youth groups/gangs in a workshop setting. They acknowledge and explore the positive support that gangs can provide to young people, especially for those who have been born into this environment and only know this lifestyle. Their objective is to challenge group/gang thinking and behaviour, and examine the impacts of this on each individual group/gang member.

There is an outline for a three-day workshop, with the headings Space and Territory, Status and Reputation, and Enemies and Revenge. Each workshop day is mapped out, with a start time and the suggested time length for each activity. All group activities and games have a clear introduction and bullet point instructions, and include useful comments by the authors. The activities and games are physical, thought-provoking and fun.

I found the workshop format of the manual well-organised, easy to follow and inspirational. The games and activities are creative, giving the reader tools to engage with young people in a number of settings and situations. I recommend this book to anyone who works with young people. Conflict resolution is often a component of this work, regardless of gang associations or affiliations.

*Kim Boyd* is a Youth Court supervisor, *Child, Youth and Family, Tai Tokerau Service Centre*.

## ***Domestic Violence and Child Protection: Directions for good practice***

Edited by Cathy Humphreys and Nicky Stanley  
Published in 2006 by Jessica Kingsley Publishers,  
London

ISBN 1-84310-276-5

RRP NZ\$66.00

*Reviewed by Karen Petrie*

Family violence is an ongoing area of concern for child protection workers, and how we ensure the safety of children while addressing both adult safety and adult violence is a complex area. *Domestic Violence and Child Protection: Directions for good practice* provides up-to-date research and directions for policy and practice, and, although mainly UK-based, is very relevant and applicable to work in New Zealand.

There are four clearly defined areas.

- Part one – defining the issue/setting the scene.
- Part two – children's view and needs.
- Part three – protecting women and children.
- Part four – working with perpetrators.

Parts one and three provide practical and relevant information for social workers, beginning with the opening chapter, which highlights clear risk factors that social workers can utilise in their work with families. This includes recognising the strong correlation between the severe abuse of women and physical abuse of children, the risks of domestic violence in pregnancy, and the number of risk factors following separation. The chapter on using research in part three adds to professional practice knowledge with its examinations of risks around excluding fathers.

Part two of the book focuses what children and adolescents who have experienced domestic violence have to say and the importance of ensuring that these voices are heard, even at the highest levels of government. In the final section, the chapter focusing on assessing perpetrators is particularly useful, and provides very clear examples of questions to ask both parents. One area not developed as well as it could have been was the therapeutic intervention outlined in later chapters, which did not note how successful this had been in changing behaviour.

Although this book didn't address how to engage men more successfully, and what programmes or interventions would work with them, I found it a very relevant tool for social workers. The research on risk factors and professional dangerousness is relevant and topical, and can be included in everyday practice.

*Karen Petrie is a practice manager, Child, Youth and Family, National Call Centre.*

## ***Improving Children's Services Networks: Lessons from family centres***

By Jane Tunstill, Jane Aldgate and Marilyn Hughes

Published in 2006 by Jessica Kingsley Publishers,  
London

ISBN 1-84310-461-X

RRP Not available

*Reviewed by Trish Kirk*

Social services everywhere operate in an environment of competing priorities, finite or diminishing resources, changing policies, and increasing responsibilities. *Improving Children's Services Networks* is of interest to those who want to understand key practice and policy

issues in this environment. This book reports on an evaluation into family centres on their interagency work and workforce development, and on what centre users say about the services.

Family centres have been around in England for four decades. They are locally-based and provide a range of statutory and voluntary social services to individuals, groups and communities. The Family Centre Network takes a holistic approach to its work with families. It places a strong emphasis on prevention and partnership, and on the rights of those who use the centres to play a key role in service design and delivery.

The authors are all academics and are respected commentators on social service and health care issues. They provide a detailed and very readable retrospective account of family centres in the last decade. Where possible, they have made links between their data and the current political environment and social trends that underpin the Every Child Matters legislation. They demonstrate their in-depth knowledge of the environment by outlining the complex nature of providing social services to families in a modern environment where parenting is complex and difficult, and faces many influences.

Key components of the family centre role are reviewed, such as their potential to act as a gateway to services, to facilitate links and to act as co-ordinating centres for family support services. There is a large amount of detail provided in each chapter, which is particularly informative. The characteristics that assisted in building and maintaining links and ongoing partnerships are outlined – these include responsiveness, respecting roles, undertaking formal collaborative work and having structures in close proximity. The authors also provide insight into and examples of the tensions and opportunities that can and do exist between

child protection social workers and centre workers who take a broader ecological approach to their work.

Significant workforce issues are identified in the study and I was pleased to see a chapter on the importance of centre managers and staff because they have a major impact on the outcomes for children and families who use the services. Family centre workers and child protection workers are faced daily with the pressure to meet complex client needs, to find resources for staff development and to provide multicultural services.

This is a timely publication and has much to offer providers of statutory and voluntary social service organisations in New Zealand, especially as we move towards more interagency work and face key issues around how to develop and retain skilled workers.

*Trish Kirk is a senior advisor at Child, Youth and Family, National Office.*

### ***Valuing and Educating Young People: Stern love the Lyward way***

By Jeremy Harvey

Published in 2006 by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London

ISBN 1-84310-056-8

RRP NZ\$48.95

*Reviewed by Laurel Webb*

Author Jeremy Harvey was head teacher of the well-known Bishop Fox Community School in the UK for 20 years and has 33 years' experience of teaching in both state schools and the private sector. While at Bishop Fox, he completed his PhD on educationalist George Lyward, drawing on information from students who had been helped by Lyward and staff who had worked with him.

George Lyward had innovative and creative ideas for working with boys who were seen as difficult or challenging by traditional teachers. His ideas were new and controversial for their day, particularly his view that teaching needed to be holistic.

Lyward was born in 1894. He studied to be a Church of England priest, but withdrew two weeks before ordination and at the age of 18 he became a teacher in a preparatory school. It was in the 1930s that he began his residential, therapeutic re-educational work at Finchden Manor, which is the main focus of the book.

Most of the students at the school were adolescent males who were not coping in the general education system. Lyward was 'concerned with providing security' for 'those who have pulled down the shutters on themselves or bitten society'. He believed in accepting limitations and ensuring pupils didn't fear criticism for committing minor misdemeanours, but understood that their actions had consequences.

His basic principles were to:

- create "membership" and establish feelings of safety within the school group
- foster "hospitality" through an atmosphere of welcoming, respect, manners and inclusiveness
- be creative with discipline and place emphasis on flexibility, play and humour
- focus on nourishment of the mind by allowing time for emotional readiness for learning.

The approaches used by Lyward must be seen in the context of an era when ideologies were not necessarily based on empirical evidence. His methods were unstructured and in an intuitive, metaphysical framework, which would be difficult to emulate in today's climate.

Although many of the concepts in this book are not directly related to social work nor are they new in terms of today's practices and beliefs. However, teachers, parents and all professionals trying to reach challenging students will find Harvey's discussion and his adapted application of Lyward's educational approach insightful and valuable.

*Laurel Webb is a care specialist, Child, Youth and Family, Tai Tokerau Service Centre.*

### ***Dementia Care: Training manual for staff working in nursing and residential settings***

By Danny Walsh

Published in 2006 by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London

ISBN 1-84310-318-4

RRP Not available

*Reviewed by Bernadette Clark*

*Dementia Care: Training manual for staff working in nursing and residential settings* is linked to UK national occupational and vocational standards and is designed to be used by individuals or groups as a training manual for those working in nursing and residential settings. This is an interactive workbook which challenges the reader to examine their own working practices and/or beliefs about dementia.

The author is a lecturer in Mental Health at the University of Nottingham and has provided both basic theory and practical guidelines that help care workers challenge their own and others' assumptions about dementia. Each topic is followed by exercises designed to help develop insight into the needs of people with dementia and to examine how a carer's behaviour and actions can best help them.

The first two chapters focus on what is known about dementia and can be easily understood by medical laypeople. The explanations and the exercises are designed to help care staff gain skills and confidence. There are plenty of training exercises, which can be photocopied. I particularly liked the way that the discussion points and the many questions posed encourage the reader to reflect on their own practice and beliefs.

The chapters on communication and individual care are also good, as is the chapter on bad practice and abuse, but I would have liked to have seen more attention given to supporting and including relatives and friends. The ethical questions about colluding and the use of medication are dealt with, although more discussion on risk management might have better linked the high ethical standards with practical day-to-day care.

The final chapter of the book is called Supporting Each Other and it offers useful advice on the need for support for carers.

*The great majority of those who work most closely with clients with dementia are care assistants. For many, there are greater financial rewards to be had working in the local supermarket. This is a sad indictment which reflects the low priority we as a society place on the continuing care of older people with dementia and older people generally.*

*Given this situation it is essential that care staff are well supported if they are not to burn out and become disillusioned. A large part of this means supporting each other. The rest is support from trained staff, managers and training programmes.*

Although this book is aimed at carers in residential units, it also has much to offer social workers and carers in the community. It is easy to dip in and find answers to specific questions. The downside is that a lot of reference is made to specific UK standards and legislation and the resources are all based there, but the main body can be used by any practitioner working with dementia sufferers so it is still a very useful training tool.

*Bernadette Clark is a care and protection social worker, Child, Youth and Family, Hamilton.*

***Aims***

- ∴ To provide discussion of social work practice in Child, Youth and Family.
- ∴ To encourage reflective and innovative social work practice.
- ∴ To extend practice knowledge in any aspect of adoption, care and protection, residential care and youth justice practice.
- ∴ To extend knowledge in any child, family or related service, on any aspect of administration, supervision, casework, group work, community organisation, teaching, research, interpretation, interdisciplinary work, or social policy theory, as it relates to professional practice relevant to Child, Youth and Family and the wider social work sector.



# Social Work Now

## INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Child, Youth and Family, a service of the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), welcomes submissions for *Social Work Now* on topics relevant to social work practitioners and social work which aim to promote professionalism and practice excellence. *Social Work Now* is a publicly funded journal which is available free of charge and submissions published in the journal are made available on the Child, Youth and Family website ([www.cyf.govt.nz/SocialWorkNow.htm](http://www.cyf.govt.nz/SocialWorkNow.htm)) and through electronic library databases.

### **Submissions**

Submission may include:

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- : *Practice articles*: Contributions for practice articles are welcomed from social workers, other Child, Youth and Family staff and professionals working within the wider field. Articles can include accounts of innovative workplace practice, case reports, research, education, review articles, conference and workshop reports, and should be around 1,000–2,000 words.
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If you would like to submit an article or review to *Social Work Now*, or if you have any queries please email [socialworknow@cyf.govt.nz](mailto:socialworknow@cyf.govt.nz).

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**Social Work Now**  
**Ministry of Social Development**  
**PO Box 1556**  
**Wellington**

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