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The Practice Journal of Child, Youth and Family

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ISSN 1173-4906

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social
2002 work
now²¹

Social Work Now is published three times a year by the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services.

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Editorial

THE MAGIC OF THE ACT

Judge Andrew Becroft considers the findings of the Ministerial Taskforce on Youth Offending

To plan for a year, plant a rice paddy field; to plan for a decade, plant a forest; but to plan for a generation, nurture youth – Indian proverb

Recently I observed the Children’s Court of Victoria in Melbourne. It is a wonderful new, purpose-built, 21st century facility. We could only dream of such a complex for New Zealand. But although I marvelled, I left reassured. We cannot match the buildings, but we can be profoundly glad of our system. I returned to New Zealand with a sharpened focus and renewed enthusiasm for our community-based system and the principles of our Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act.

We must hang on to our Act. And we must remember the “magic” of the Family Group Conference (FGC), the lynchpin of the system. On the day I wrote this article, I sat by the edge of Lake Tekapo with the South Island Family Group Conference Co-ordinators at their annual conference. One of them urged her colleagues to view themselves as “kaitiaki”, or guardians of the FGC, and to ensure that the FGC and the Act are treated with respect.

Indeed, this was the overwhelming message received by the Ministerial Taskforce on Youth Offending – that there is widespread support for the legislative basis of the youth justice system.

However (and it is an important qualification), there is significant concern that the innovative aims and philosophy of the youth justice provisions of the Act, widely acclaimed internationally, are being thwarted by inadequate resourcing, inconsistent inter-agency co-operation, and a lack of national leadership and direction.

In my first months as Principal Youth Court Judge, I have been struck by the number of government departments with a legitimate operational or policy interest in the Youth Justice system, and that is to say nothing of the enormous community involvement. Yet the buck stops with nobody. No one entity is finally responsible. Shared leadership has meant no leadership. One department must provide co-ordinated oversight. This was a clear recommendation of the Taskforce Chairperson.

The Taskforce has provided a valuable opportunity for all agencies to reflect upon their performance and to hear the views of those involved up and down the country. Its greatest strength was that it was a true inter-agency endeavour. What was agreed is therefore likely to happen. But it is obviously difficult for those very agencies to independently critique their own performance and to admit to failures. Only an independent examination could achieve this.

Even with that caveat, the Taskforce in its Youth Offending Strategy has provided a comprehensive set of recommendations. They may not be revolutionary, but a revolution was not required. Let us remember that the Act is revolutionary. What is needed is better practice and better resourcing. Here the Taskforce delivers.

The recommendations are delivered through seven key focus areas:

- 1. Co-ordination and leadership:** (The concept of Local Youth Offending Teams, which will emulate the best of existing local inter-agency partnership, and which will be monitored by a national Senior Officials Group, offers real potential.) A social worker will need to be involved in every Youth Offending Team.
- 2. Information:** There has been no centralised collection of statistics to analyse offending trends. Also a minimum Youth Justice data set will be developed. More importantly, there will be a screening assessment mechanism developed for use at key intervention points.
- 3. Early intervention:** Among the strongest predictors of youth offending are inadequate or inappropriate parenting, child abuse and neglect, early childhood cognitive or behaviour problems and family disadvantage. There are comprehensive proposals to increase early intervention initiatives. This was a fundamental concern of the taskforce.
- 4. Children and young persons at risk**
- 5. First contact with police**
- 6. Family Group Conferences**
- 7. Serious young offenders.**

There is little point in repeating all the key recommendations contained in the youth offending strategy. They speak for themselves.

As readers of this magazine are social workers, you may well ask “what are the key implications for us?” Apart from the structural/leadership issues, it must be accepted that early intervention is fundamental. Social workers can

play a valuable part here in identifying at-risk children with high needs who are likely to become persistent youth offenders.

Another important message is to reinforce that “one size does not fit all”. Generally speaking there are two types of youth offenders. A large group are “desisters”, who comprise up to 80% of youth offenders but commit only 20% of the offences. With good interventions these young people can be quickly helped to put offending behind them. But there is a much smaller group, about 10-15% of youth offenders, who commit up to 80% of all youth offences. These are “persisters”, who begin to offend very early, say at age eight or nine, and become adult offenders. This is the group that we have failed with. We need to do much better here.

The challenge therefore is to do the basic Family Group Conferencing work well so that the vast proportion of youth offenders are quickly helped to exit the system, but also to have a much more comprehensive approach for the serious young offenders who need to be identified early. There is also a pressing need to do better work with child offenders. Here, comprehensive risk and needs assessments will be crucial.

Which gets us back to the quotation at the beginning of this article. The role of social workers is a pivotal and responsible one. Yours is the chance to help fire “the last best shot” on behalf of the community. There is no more challenging yet rewarding task than to nurture youth, especially youth at risk of offending. □



*Andrew Becroft is the
Principal Youth Court Judge*



Tracking truants in Wanganui

Phil Kilmister and Brenda Baxter relate recidivist truancy with youth offending

Every day of each school term, many hundreds of New Zealand children fail to attend school classes, in breach of legal obligations.¹ By persistently truanting and by failing to catch up on classes, those absent students exclude themselves from educational and life-enriching opportunities. Fearing that truancy may be the first step on the path to delinquent and criminal activity, the Wanganui Truancy Service (WTS) decided to investigate the correlation of recidivist truancy of intermediate school-age children and youth offending in the Wanganui area over a three-year period from 1999 to 2001 and to implement early intervention strategies to improve school attendances.

Truancy, for the purpose of this study, is defined as an unjustified absence (ie without the proper approval of appropriate school personnel) for any period of time from the school at which the child is enrolled. Parentally-condoned absences, without notification to the school, are included in that definition. Recidivist truants are those who repeatedly absent themselves from their classes without adequate explanation and are located three or more times by the local truancy service.

The term “intermediate school age” is used in this report to include those students aged from 10 to 12 years, while “primary school age” describes the students under 10 years of age.

Wanganui Truancy Service

The WTS began its patrols in 1995. Funded largely by the Ministry of Education, it regularly monitors and evaluates its activities in order to improve its service delivery to students and families as well as to schools. Its one full-time Operations Manager, one part-time Attendance Officer and several volunteers are currently involved in delivering service to students, families and the schools. The trained staff are authorised attendance officers for 41 of the district’s schools, and responsible for following up the students who are enrolled in, but absent from, those schools. Private schools are not included as they do not use the service. There were about 8,000 enrolled students in this district in 2001, and half of these were of intermediate and secondary school ages.

It must be noted that only enrolled students are the focus of this study, as non-enrolled students are in the domain of the national Non-Enrolment Truancy Service (NETS).² A constructive working relationship exists between the two services, as their respective activities sometimes overlap. Both services focus on maximising educational opportunities for the child or young person.

Wanganui community profile 2000

Wanganui has slightly more 0 to 19-year-olds than the national average. Nearly half of the

1 Education Act 1989 s.20: “every person who is not a foreign student is required to be enrolled at a registered school at all times during the period beginning on the person’s 6th birthday and ending on the person’s 16th birthday.”; s.25 (1) “every student of a registered school (other than a correspondence school) who is required by s.20 of this Act to be enrolled at a registered school shall attend the school whenever it is open.”

2 This service was set up nationally in 1996 to locate and assist children/young persons who are thought to be not enrolled at any school. The Ministry of Education advised schools at that time that any student who is absent from school for 20 days without explanation or notice that s/he is attending another school should be removed from the school’s roll and referred to NETS.

district's schools have a decile rating of less than three, whereas the national average is 32%. Police records show that the Wanganui juveniles who were apprehended in 1998 committed over half of the offences in the wider central business district.³ The 2001 census figures also indicate that Wanganui is economically poorer, and its residents received less formal education than the national average.

Wanganui is known for its well-developed sense of community, and countless volunteers actively engage in a range of innovative community projects. The establishment of the WTS is one example of on-going community co-operation and inter-agency communication. The weekly liaison between the WTS Operations Manager and the Police Youth Aid section was significant in this project.

Wanganui District Court Judge Andrew Becroft⁴ listed non-attendance at school as one of the three most common features amongst the juveniles who appeared in the Wanganui Youth Court in the late 1990s and noted that not all truants break the law, but "almost all who offend are truants."⁵ Truancy, when not addressed, can have significant negative effects on the students, schools and society. By successfully targeting early truancy, the reduction of a generation of criminals could result.

Targeting truants

The work of the WTS attendance officers is to reduce the number of truants. On their random patrols, foot or vehicular, they exercise their authority to act on behalf of the schools and question children and young persons who they suspect should be at school.⁶ The normal course

of the attendance officers' involvement with students comes through school personnel who monitor classroom attendance, and who continue to educate parents on the necessity to contact the school with an explanation for any child's absence. Without parental explanations of student absences, safety concerns for the absent child are an issue.

The priority is to return the student safely to school. In the process, underlying problems in the school environment may be identified and strategies may be put in place with the assistance and guidance of education professionals for the return of the child.

The schools recognise that the less a young person is at school, the less chance they have of achieving academically, and have developed extensive measures and resources to encourage full attendance. Schools' statutory obligation⁷ is very wide. Boards of Trustees are to take all reasonable steps, by any means thought appropriate, to ensure the attendance of students enrolled at their school. The strategies include systematic monitoring of absences, peer support or buddying, independent management plans, daily reporting and family liaison. Other resources utilised by schools include school counsellors and social workers, Resource Teacher Learning Behaviours, school health nurse support, Special Education Services, Police Youth Aid section and Child, Youth and Family. It appears that schools, generally, have been reluctant to prosecute errant parents.

Truancy was found to be closely linked with family situations in a 1994 Wanganui truancy study⁸ which went on to recommend that interventions take the family situation into

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 By successfully targeting
 early truancy, the reduction
 of a generation of criminals
 could result
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3 Police statistics, 1998

4 Now Principal Youth Court Judge of New Zealand

5 "Youth At Risk: Where is the Community?" Keynote address by Judge A. Becroft to New Zealand Trustees Association Annual Conference, Wanganui, 1998.

6 "When a student is observed to be out of school without a school pass or reasonable explanation, the attendance officer approaches him or her in a friendly, non-confrontational way. Volunteers must not touch any young person and they must not chase them if the truant decides to 'do a runner'." Tony Cato, Wanganui Truancy Service, *Wanganui Chronicle*, June 11, 1998

7 s.31 Education Act 1989

8 M. Timmer-Arends, *Truancy*, Unpublished research paper 1994

consideration. Some families present complex intergenerational problems which cannot be resolved without an integrated response from supporting agencies. WTS has aimed to involve the wider family in its truancy preventative activities. Home visits may be arranged with families of students who refuse to accept that they have an obligation to attend school, so that other possible options can be considered for the child's schooling. Parents are also reminded that continued absences are neither appropriate nor legal, and could lead to a prosecution.⁹ WTS knows of one successful prosecution in this district in recent years, but prefers, as do the schools, less punitive measures for enabling wayward truants to resume normal school attendance.

Data correlation

The annual student contacts made by WTS have steadily reduced throughout the length of this project. However, despite the diverse measures adopted by schools and the service, some truants start as early as six and go through to age 15. The figures for the 2001 school year indicate that WTS Attendance Officers made a total of 449 contacts with students under 16 years of age.

The table below indicates the total numbers of intermediate school-age children who have been identified as truants during the past three years, as well as the number of those who truanted twice, and those with a history of primary school-age truancy.

Table 1. Patterns of Truancy

	1999	2000	2001
Intermediate school-age truants	66	97	41
Intermediate school-age truants contacted twice by WTS	44	66	36
Students known to have truanted at primary school age	22	19	18

The above figures indicate that approximately two-thirds of these truants were located out of

school on more than one occasion by WTS staff, and that one-third of intermediate school-age truants had begun to absent themselves from schooling during the primary school years. It must be noted that these figures represent only school-based data. The number of enrolled students who may have truanted at primary school age, but are no longer enrolled by the time they attain intermediate school age, was not identified in this study.

Early interventions (which are discussed in more detail later) by WTS and the local schools not only lessened the numbers of truanting students in the third year of the project, but also led to improved attendance by many of the truants. The following table shows the numbers of truants who missed fewer classes as a result of proactive WTS and school interventions.

Table 2. Improved Attendance of Truants

	1999	2000	2001
Intermediate school-age truants	66	97	41
Improved attendances	44	66	36

Approximately two-thirds of the non-attending intermediate-aged students in the first two years of the study resumed their studies. In the third year, 2001, the returns were higher as more than four-fifths of the truants improved their attendance at school.

WTS's holistic approach to dealing with truancy as a family issue has impacted on the incidence of parentally condoned truancy. From 18 and 20 cases respectively in the first two years of this study, this figure was reduced to only four in 2001. However, the number of young Māori male truants is disproportionately higher for groupings by ethnicity and gender over the three years: 23 (out of 66) in 1999, 40 (out of 97) in 2000 and 19 (out of 41) in 2001. The Ministry of Māori Development found in 1998 that, on average, Māori have lower levels of educational achievement than non-Māori. While the reasons

⁹ The Education Act of 1989 (s.24) stipulates that where the parent of a child required by the Act to be enrolled at a registered school fails or refuses to ensure that a child is enrolled, the parent commits an offence.

are complex, a factor may be the failure of the mainstream education system to adequately meet the educational needs and aspirations of Māori.¹⁰

There may be a number of reasons why a young person truant from school. For example, absenteeism – whether erratic or long-term – can result from anti-social behaviours, boredom, parental neglect, bullying, social stigmas, peer pressure, parentally condoned absences to help out in the home, staying at home to complete school assignments, drug/alcohol abuse, health issues, teacher relationship problems, and failure to address learning gaps or cultural barriers.

Whatever the rationale behind the unexplained absences, the out-of-school activities of some of the truants have brought them to the attention of the Youth Aid section of the Police. The following table shows the numbers of intermediate school-age truants seen by Wanganui Police Youth Aid during the past three years.

Table 3. Links between Truants and Police Youth Aid

	1999	2000	2001
Intermediate school-age truants	66	97	41
Truants noticed by Youth Aid	21	27	19
Truants who came to the notice of Youth Aid three times or more	6	7	9

There is a general correlation between truancy and youth offending here. In the first two years of this study, approximately one-third of the intermediate school-age truants came to the notice of the Police Youth Aid section, and roughly 10% of the truants offended on three or more occasions. The continued WTS focus on truants of the middle school years markedly reduced the total numbers of intermediate school-age truants from 97 in 2000 to 41 in 2001.

WTS also collated data on the links between the patterns of early non-attendance at school and prolonged patterns of truancy. The next table shows the numbers of primary school-age truants who persisted in their truanting behaviours.

Table 4. Recidivist Truants

	1999	2000	2001
Previous primary school-age truants	22	19	18
Students showing recidivist truancy patterns	22	31	5

It is evident that a small number of intermediate school-age students are recidivist truants and at risk of becoming serious offenders. However, while the proportion of intermediate school-age truants who were considered to be recidivist truants in 1999 is very similar to the numbers who began truanting during their primary school years, that ratio does not continue in the following two years. In 2000, the numbers being contacted by Youth Aid are in excess of the primary school-age truant figures, yet in 2001, that trend is markedly reversed.

Nearing their teenage years the multiple risks of offending, dropping out of education, and experiencing other personal difficulties increase for some young people. Risk factors¹¹ associated with antisocial and criminal behaviours highlight a range of family factors – such as family violence and disharmony, father absence, negative interaction, poor supervision, child rejection and neglect – as well as some negative school factors which are instrumental in limiting the child's ability to feel a sense of belonging or to succeed.

However, positive factors can protect youth by lessening the impact of those risks or by changing the way they respond to risk factors. Clear standards of behaviour, positive adult and peer relationships, family support and good coping mechanisms are examples of protective factors that have been developed to divert children toward positive outcomes.

Case studies

The following three case studies have been randomly sampled from the recidivist truants of this study in order to consider common risk

¹⁰ Their research also found that while Māori represented 21% of all 5-14 year old enrolments in schools, a significantly greater percentage of Māori students are suspended from school for varying lengths of time. Ngā Tatauranga Matauranga Māori/ Māori Education Statistics: Te Puni Kōkiri website, 1998

¹¹ Pathways to Prevention, National Crime Prevention, January 1999

factors and examine the application of early interventions. Jack¹² is a 13-year-old European/Māori who began to truant at 10 years of age. Sam is a 12-year-old European who first came to notice of the truancy service at age 10. Celia, a 12-year-old Māori, just started truanting this year.

From their case histories, five common risk factors emerge. These include a transient school history, a family history of non-achievement in education, poor attendance habits from primary school, lack of clear boundaries set by parents/caregivers, and being noticed by Police in middle childhood. Other risk factors observed in Celia's case were no close friends or siblings, little contact with parents, and lack of self-esteem. Both boys used cigarettes; Jack also accessed drugs and alcohol.

Mindful of grim forecasts that "the long-term financial cost of failing these children [and others like them] will be measured in the hundreds of millions of dollars they will cost the Crown in welfare benefits, income support and prison costs",¹³ the WTS Operations Manager, Phil Kilmister initiated a number of early intervention strategies during the developmentally crucial transition period from primary to secondary school.

Jack's history of poor attendance and prior suspensions counted against all endeavours to re-engage him into the formal education system. His placement, through Special Education Services, at a special school worked for a short period. However, local intermediate schools remained reluctant to enrol him. On a diversion contract due to his minor offending, Youth Aid referred him to NETS, which in turn referred him to a community-based youth-at-risk wrap-around programme called Life to the Max. Their holistic approach with Jack and his family included life, literacy and numeracy skills as well as a quit-smoking programme, and Jack's

offending ceased whilst involved. His continued attendance at school is not known, as Jack has since left the district.

Through Sam's frequent contacts with the WTS attendance officers, he began to rely on them for his care whenever he did not attend school. His need to direct attention to himself led to minor offending and involvement with the Police Youth Aid section. The agreed outcome of an informal Family Group Conference (FGC) was that a Special Education Service assessment would be undertaken. The resultant referral to the Resource Teacher for Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) produced a comprehensive plan to assist with regular attendance and the transition to secondary school. The application of the Strengthening Families model¹⁴ reduced the previously

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Celia, rather than her
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attended school
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fragmented approach to the multiple issues related to Sam's non-attendance. The plan was monitored through three further FGCs involving Sam, his parents, the RTLB and the WTS officers. Sam's attendance at school improved immediately, and a smooth transition to secondary school has been achieved with an awareness of his special needs. The follow-up on issues arising from the family meetings was a key ingredient for success in this case.

Celia, the third student, was embarrassed about her early physical development. She lived out of town and some distance from her school. The school had previously introduced a home-based schooling programme so that she could continue with her education despite an illness. On her recovery, Celia repeatedly created excuses to avoid learning opportunities and she, rather than her caregiver grandfather, decided whether she attended school. The WTS attendance officer travelled out of town three times to return Celia to the school. Even after the WTS officer had explained the legal obligations of caregivers to ensure school attendance, and the

12 For reasons of confidentiality, real names have not been used in this report.

13 Donna Awatere Huata MP, ACT website, August 13, 2001

14 Strengthening Families, an interagency team approach for co-ordinated social service delivery, was introduced in New Zealand in 1995.

school arranged a counselling referral for Celia, her out-of-school activities resulted in her case coming to the notice of the Police Youth Aid officer. Further dialogue with the grandparent was followed by a Youth Aid officer's warning of a possible s.29 prosecution for Celia's non-attendance. Her attendance improved immediately, and Celia is now fully re-integrated into the education system. Ongoing, but less frequent, counselling is still being provided by the school. The early hard-line approach taken by Youth Aid was clearly a significant factor in turning around Celia's truanting behaviour.

Conclusion

The three-year study has built upon the recognition that truancy is a problem not only for children, but also for families, schools and communities. Through regular community and school liaison, the WTS was able to successfully co-ordinate and monitor a number of early intervention strategies which addressed the risk factors, strengthened families and increased school attendances.

The data indicate that the early identification of primary school-age truanting tendencies can be followed up with effective interventions to reduce the number of recidivist truants. However, links are evident between the truancy behaviours of 10- to 12-year-old children and a small core of youth offenders of the same age.

The use of punitive measures such as prosecutions was not a feature of this project. WTS, in co-operation with schools, Police Youth Aid officers and community agencies, was able to devise customised family-focused solutions to break the emerging patterns of more than half of non-attending intermediate school-age students, and assist their transition back to mainstream education. Much of the success of the project is attributed to the early timing of

the interventions and the commitment to a collaborative problem-solving approach.

The young subjects of this project are now entering their teenage years and going on to secondary schooling. The WTS will continue to monitor them to assess the longterm effects of its strategies. □



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Brenda Baxter is Wanganui Safer Community Council Co-ordinator





Challenging offending behaviour

– a residential perspective

Ashley Seaford and Shirley Johnson aim to reduce recidivism among young offenders in residences

In the past, Child, Youth and Family residential centres providing youth justice programmes have focused primarily on containing young offenders. Attempts to address young people's offending tended to be practical, straightforward and easy to implement. Over the past four years, the Kingslea Residential Centre has made a break with this and has been developing a programme, Challenging Offending, to teach participants a variety of intellectual, social and interpersonal skills that will hopefully go some way to reducing rates of re-offending. This article outlines the development and content of the programme.

The first part of the paper provides the reader with relevant background information in relation to youth crime in New Zealand. The next section briefly outlines a Canadian correctional programme on whose principles and insights the Kingslea programme is based. Next, the design, development, implementation, management and contents of the Challenging Offending programme are explored. The final part of this paper considers future directions of the programme and the evaluation of its effectiveness in reducing offending amongst its graduates.

Young offenders in New Zealand

New Zealand's statistics on youth offending make for sad reading. A recent report on the conviction and sentencing of offenders shows that each year since the mid-1990s, 30,000 to 31,000 arrests of 14-to-16-year-olds were made by the police. In 2000, the total apprehension rate of this age group was 40 percent greater than the 1991 figure. The number of 14-to-16-year-olds arrested for violent offences has increased during the last two years of the decade, with the 2000 figure double that of the 1991 figure (from 1,681 to 3,384). The majority of apprehensions involving young people in 2000 were for crimes of dishonesty, with the 2000 figure showing an 11% increase on 1991. Over the last 10 years one of the largest increases, 126%, has been for property damage. In terms of offender demographics, unsurprisingly the majority are male. In 2000, where ethnicity was identified, over 50% of the young offenders were Māori, 37% European and 9% Pacific Island (Ministry of Justice, 2001). New Zealand is not alone in the problem of youth offending, and undoubtedly similar trends are evident in other Western countries such as Australia and the UK.

The financial cost to society of young offenders is not clear. However, given the number of different services involved, it must surely be significant. A Department of Corrections estimate (2001) suggests that young offenders who go on to a career of adult offending cost the taxpayer around \$3 million each. Given the often traumatic impact of crime upon individual victims and the wider implications for society, it is no surprise that serious efforts are being made to treat young offenders. In terms of treatment, hopes hit a low point in the mid-1970s when researchers in the USA and England concluded that there were no effective interventions to reduce recidivism (Farrington, 1993). However, since this time ongoing work has led to the development of anti-offending programmes based on cognitive behavioural methods. Possibly the most comprehensive and best known of these programmes emerged from Canada in the mid-1980s.

Cognitive training in Canada

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Canadian psychologist/criminologist Dr Robert Ross and a colleague undertook an extensive review of correctional programmes used in the USA over the preceding few years. They concluded that the most effective programmes contained some component(s) that targeted the participant's thinking patterns. As Ross states, "effective programs included as a target of their intervention not only the offender's behaviour, his feelings, his vocation or interpersonal skills but his cognition, his self-evaluation, his expectations, his understanding and his appraisal of his world, and his values" (Ross et al, 1988). From further research, Ross proposed that many adult and young offenders displayed a number of deficits in important intellectual skills which ultimately contributed to their

offending. Such deficits in "cognitive skills" included the inability to consider the consequences of their behaviour, the inability to learn via punishment, impulsiveness, difficulty in solving interpersonal problems, poor capacity for thinking in abstract terms, and difficulty in empathising with others. Additionally, offenders tended to be egocentric, be action orientated and have an external "locus of control" (Ross et al, 1988). It seems that these thinking deficits were not the result of low intelligence but rather a consequence of limited learning opportunities. Not all offenders displayed the above thinking deficits. Those most likely to display them included young, chronic, violent, alcohol abusing and sex offenders (Ross et al, 1988).

In the mid-1980s, Dr Ross and Elizabeth Fabiano developed a cognitive training programme called Reasoning and Rehabilitation. The programme's basic aim was to teach Canadian offenders certain thinking skills that would hopefully aid them to live a crime-free life. The programme was trialled with adults identified as at high risk of offending. The results were positive, showing that participation in the programme led to a reduction in recidivism (Ross et al, 1988). Ross and Fabiano's programme was eventually adopted by a number of Western countries, including New Zealand.

Designing a programme for New Zealand offenders

Traditionally Child, Youth and Family residential centres have focused primarily on containing young offenders and working with them in pragmatic ways (for example, by discouraging certain associations, encouraging a healthy lifestyle, enhancing work skills, increasing social skills, and securing employment) to attempt to reduce their offending. The reasons for this approach are numerous but probably include the

lack of credible, specifically designed correctional programmes, a belief that only highly trained staff could work successfully with young offenders, and uncertainty on the part of management and staff as to whether the residence should provide containment, treatment or some combination of both.

In 1997, work began on designing, implementing and managing an anti-offending programme that could be delivered by the residence's staff. The research and design of the programme was based on the principles and insights identified by Ross and Fabiano and additional ideas by the staff involved. Some changes and improvements have been made to the original programme over the past four years after feedback and suggestions from both facilitators and participants. The Challenging Offending programme complements and augments the other programmes at Kingslea, for example, Mana Wahine, educational and vocational skills, life skills, and cultural, alcohol/drug and anger management programmes.

The Challenging Offending programme

Kingslea's current Challenging Offending programme is timed to coincide with the length of sentence most of its participants receive from the Youth Court under s.311 of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act, that is, eight weeks. The programme is run four days a week for 45 minutes per session. The groups of young people involved are small, with six participating on average. Smaller numbers allow higher individual input from the facilitator and also make control and monitoring simpler. The programme is facilitated by two dedicated staff members. One has a background in presenting

similar programmes with adult prisoners and another is well experienced in working with young offenders. Both of these facilitators receive ongoing supervision from a senior staff member. Where possible, the same facilitator is responsible for delivering the eight-week programme. The vagaries of shift work make this somewhat difficult; however, consistency is considered important.

Presently two groups are run. One contains a stable group of young people who will generally be there for the entire programme, while the other consists of young people on remand whose turnover can be rapid.

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Young people receive "points" for their participation and behaviour, which are accumulated and can be traded for suitable rewards
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Attendance is mandatory. To encourage participation and appropriate behaviour a token economy system is utilised. Young people receive "points" for their participation and

behaviour, which are accumulated and can be traded for suitable rewards.

Not surprisingly, the involuntary and quickly changing group presents specific problems of facilitation and delivery such as lack of motivation and commitment, disruptive behaviour and different learning levels. Facilitators have had to hone their skills as much as possible to negate these issues.

Each programme participant has their own workbook, which contains copies of the programme's material. Each week the facilitators complete progress reports for each young person, commenting on general behaviour, participation and understanding of material taught. These reports are forwarded to the young person's residential caseworker and their field social worker.

The programme recognises that people learn in different ways and its concepts, knowledge and skills are taught using a variety of approaches such as games, quizzes, group discussion and role plays, as well as traditional teaching methods.

The format and aims of the programme

What follows is an outline of the present format of the programme, with a brief explanation of the aim of each module.

- : ***Group Development:*** The purpose of this module is to establish a positive atmosphere and relationships between the facilitator and group members and among the young people themselves. Operating guidelines for the group are set and exercises carried out to encourage openness and trust. A certain amount of self-disclosure is expected.
- : ***Communication Skills:*** This module targets and attempts to enhance group members' verbal and non-verbal communication skills. For example, assertive communication, as opposed to aggressive/passive, is taught and practised.
- : ***Thinking Skills:*** The focus of this module is to teach a variety of important intellectual skills. Participants are taught techniques to help them think of the consequences of their actions on themselves and others, to think before they take action, and to think critically and logically.
- : ***Problem Solving:*** Ross proposed that some offenders have difficulties in solving interpersonal problems. This module teaches a straightforward structured problem-solving method that can be applied to a variety of difficulties encountered in life.
- : ***Mood Management:*** This module aim to help group members identify commonly experienced affective states such as anger, frustration and stress, and manage them in a positive and helpful way.
- : ***Conflict Resolution:*** This module teaches participants strategies to overcome interpersonal conflict.

- : ***Understanding Offending:*** Group members are asked to recollect their offending histories and to identify triggers to their offending. A relapse prevention framework is employed to assist participants.
- : ***Values:*** The final module looks at values and moral development and attempts to instil an empathic attitude for others, especially victims, and encourage a pro-social lifestyle.

The future of the programme

In terms of future programme development, serious thought needs to be put into participant selection. Currently, young people are expected to attend. To use resources most effectively, perhaps only motivated individuals should be permitted to attend. Another possibility is to ensure that only those most likely to benefit from participation are permitted to attend. If a young person shows little in the way of cognitive deficits or is likely to stop offending anyway (the so-called desister as opposed to the persister (Moffitt, 1993), then they should not occupy programme space that could be better used.

Another consideration is the ethnicity of the participants. In reflection of the ethnic make-up of Kingslea, many participants will be young Māori men and women. While recognising the importance of cultural differences, at present the programme is not based on a model of ethnically focused treatment delivery. Another area for development relates to gender. It is assumed that both young men and women will benefit equally from learning the same sets of skills, and while this is quite likely, Gilligan (see Kalat, 1990) reminds us that in terms of moral development women may have a different basis for deciding right from wrong.

Perhaps most importantly, high quality research is required to determine whether the programme

makes any difference to participants' recidivism. To design and implement such research is no small feat. Reviews of similar studies into Reasoning and Rehabilitation and another correctional programme, Moral Reconciliation Therapy, highlight the huge difficulties in attempting to untangle the myriad of factors that have potential influence (Allen et al, 2001). Nonetheless, all of these issues, and others which will undoubtedly arise, can be overcome with time, commitment, expertise and the allocation of appropriate resources.

In terms of the programme's broader relationship to the Department, there is nothing to prevent it being delivered to at-risk young people who are involved with the youth justice system and reside in the community. As well, there is no reason why youth justice social workers could not learn the skills associated with selected modules and use them in their day-to-day contact with their young clients. Finally, it is hoped the development of the Challenging Offending programme at Kingslea will serve as an inspiration to encourage the growth and development of other innovations that could assist troubled children and young people.

These are interesting and uncertain times, as society faces the ever-changing nature of youth culture, disadvantage and offending behaviours. Kingslea accepts that it must keep abreast of changes in the socio-cultural and technological environment. The challenges are significant as Kingslea endeavours to develop a science to its practices. It needs to know what works, why and how. It is vital to understand what young people need to learn within the residential environment if their experience of that environment is to be relevant, sustainable and of value to their rehabilitation.

Kingslea has a responsibility to make a difference in young people's lives. Programmes such as Challenging Offending, which challenge destructive thinking and inspire hope, go some way towards making this difference.

Acknowledgement

The programme currently operating at Kingslea has been possible due to the foresight and efforts of managers and staff over a four-year period. □



Ashley Seaford is the chairperson of the Kingslea Residential Centre grievance panel. He previously worked as a youth justice residential worker for Child, Youth and Family, and had early input into the development of the Challenging Offending programme.

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Evaluating the contribution of Residential Services

Alan Geraghty, Tricia Laing and Julie Warren report on the contribution of Residential Services to reducing youth offending

This paper reports on the first stage in the ongoing development of an evaluation framework which will provide a basis for Child, Youth and Family to evaluate residential services in an integrated way. It also discusses feedback from residential practitioners about the efficacy and feasibility of components of this framework, a work in progress that will be refined and improved over time. The first stage in its development has involved Child, Youth and Family and the Evaluation Unit of the Ministry of Social Development working together, with the assistance of the Centre for Research, Evaluation and Social Assessment (CRESA).¹

The process used in developing the framework involved documentary review, interviews with Child, Youth and Family residential staff, and workshops to develop and test the framework involving Child, Youth and Family and Ministry of Social Development staff. Participants in workshops and interviews included Residential Services managers, supervisors, key National Office policy and operational managers and other staff. Staff views were sought about specific outcomes associated with residential services, how residential services are or should be operated to achieve these outcomes, and evaluation needs and expectations. In addition, staff views were

sought to test the feasibility and appropriateness of the key components of the framework, given current service delivery practice and existing data collection and management.

The framework comprises:

- : a description of current and proposed residential services
- : their intended outcomes, the principles underpinning service provision and the standards of service required to achieve intended outcomes
- : potential evaluation objectives
- : issues to take into account in the design and implementation of evaluations
- : the next steps in the process.

Child, Youth and Family Residential Services

Child, Youth and Family provides 24-hour supervised residential placements for vulnerable children and young people, as a statutory requirement under the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989, when there are care and protection or youth justice concerns. Children and young people present with a range of behavioural problems and needs relating to offending and care and protection issues.

¹ The report on which this article is based was produced jointly by Child, Youth and Family and the Ministry of Social Development, under the auspices of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act Research and Evaluation Fund Management Committee.

Residential placements are high-level interventions in the lives of children and young people who require specialised care. The tension between the rights of the children and young persons and their families and the need for containment, security and rehabilitative work in the interests of the children and young persons and the wider community is at its sharpest in these services. Accordingly, admission to and management of residential services are very closely regulated.

Residential Services provides 24-hour supervised care within a secure environment and is part of a Continuum of Care, a concept which includes a range of services, currently provided by Child, Youth and Family, Iwi Social Services, Cultural Services and Child and Family Support Services. They range from relatively low level intervention in Pre-care to higher levels of intervention in Residential Care and Specialist Residential Care. The types of interventions or programmes that match with these different levels of intervention on the continuum include:

- ∴ **Pre-care**, which includes assessment of risk, needs and service requirement, and wraparound support services – without care services
- ∴ **Care Services**, which include placement with family/whānau or Child, Youth and Family or someone who provides foster care or Child, Youth and Family Family Home
- ∴ **Specialist Care Services**, which include placement in Specialist Youth Services Strategy Family Home
- ∴ **Residential Care**, which includes placement in Care and Protection or Youth Justice facilities
- ∴ **Specialist Residential Care**, which includes placement in a Conduct Disorder Programme (Youth Horizons Trust) or Adolescent Sexual Abuser Programme (Te Poutama Arahi Rangatahi).

Residential Services operates within the context of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989, which has a number of principles that are applied in all areas of work with children and young people. The principles require:

- ∴ the involvement of family, hapū, iwi and family groups in decision-making
- ∴ the strengthening of relationships within family, hapū, iwi and family groups
- ∴ consideration of the impact of decisions on the child, young person and their family, hapū, iwi and family group
- ∴ consideration of the wishes of the child or young person and the principle that decisions should be made and implemented within a time-frame appropriate to the child or young person.

Youth Justice residences in New Zealand offer shorter placements than many overseas programmes. The maximum length of time that a young person can be sentenced to spend in a Youth Justice residence is three months. Internationally it is common for young people to be sentenced for periods of residential containment in excess of a year.

The Youth Justice residences provide a secure environment for young people and a range of programmes to direct offenders away from crime, develop social skills, identify and meet cultural needs, meet educational needs and maintain family contact. The plans and objectives for a young person's stay in a Youth Justice residence are developed through the Family Group Conference and court process. With the short duration of placement in a Youth Justice residence, it is important to be able to evaluate and measure progress in meeting the goals and objectives for the young person.

Care and Protection services provide a safe environment in which the issues affecting a child

or young person can be assessed, with programmes and interventions identified “to turn the young people’s lives around” and return them to family/whānau and/or the community. Rehabilitation programmes focus on culturally appropriate education, specialist programmes, specialist clinical services and physical activities to meet the individual needs of children and young people. The mix of these required for each individual is described in individual care plans. The issues facing children and young people placed in Care and Protection residences are often complex. Placements are often made for periods of three to six months with careful discharge planning undertaken.

The provision of Residential Services requires work with a range of Child, Youth and Family and other services. Others may be involved in all the processes, from referral, needs assessment and placement, through to the provision of therapeutic programmes to discharge and follow-up.

As part of a broad Residential Service Strategy, the provision of residential services by Child, Youth and Family is currently undergoing significant change, with new and expanded facilities being developed across the country. In addition to the redevelopment of facilities, the strategy also focuses on improving the range and quality of specialist services and therapeutic and rehabilitation programmes which enable children and young people to re-enter their families and communities.

Why develop an evaluation framework?

A framework for the evaluation of Child, Youth and Family’s Residential Services was considered necessary to address a series of initiatives. A Residential Services Strategy was in the process of being implemented. Some residences were already operating and new ones were being

established. Others were still in the planning stages. Some, but not all, of the new residences had funding identified for their evaluation. This reflected variations in how managers and practitioners thought they could use evaluation results to improve the service.

The evaluations that were planned or being undertaken were set up with the expectation that they would allow for reflection on, and the monitoring of, specific residences. A common framework was needed to guide the design of the different evaluations so the results could be compared to one another and to international standards of best practice. It was necessary to bring together the knowledge of the Residential Services in a systematic way so that the service as a whole could be understood better. With an understanding of the service as a whole the Department will be in a better position to understand the contribution that Residential Services makes to the Continuum of Care, and to the intended outcomes for children and young people who use the service.

While the evaluation framework will evolve in response to what is learnt from evaluation reports, it will ensure that all evaluations will be designed using the best evaluation practice relating to Residential Services at the time. Practitioners, managers and evaluators participated in the process used to develop the first stage of the framework. These relationships can be built on to ensure that the approaches chosen for future evaluations fit with social work practice. Each new evaluation will not have to start from scratch but rather from a base of accumulated knowledge about Residential Services in Child, Youth and Family.

Issues in evaluating Residential Services

The process of developing an evaluation framework has identified the need to develop an

integrated policy and regulatory framework to underpin the provision and delivery of Residential Services. This framework is necessary both for the development of more feasible service outcomes and for the development of evaluation objectives for specific evaluations. The expansion or refining of current monitoring systems also needs to be informed by a more coherent policy framework.

As well as the need to be informed by a coherent policy and regulatory framework, evaluations of Residential Services need to be informed by the needs and experiences of Residential Services social work practitioners and other professionals and the experiences of New Zealand and international evaluators. Some broad messages for carrying out evaluations of Residential Services have been identified from these sources. These signal the need for participatory approaches to evaluation that reflect the reality of residential life and flexible evaluation designs based on the collection of qualitative and quantitative data.

The evaluation questions identified by Child, Youth and Family staff require both process and outcome components to evaluations of Residential Services. This focus is consistent with overseas experience showing that outcome evaluations alone provide insufficient information to make informed judgements.

Evaluators' experience with social workers and adolescent residents points to the importance of forming collaborative working relationships with residential staff and residents throughout all stages of the evaluation. These relationships are necessary for residential staff to have confidence in the evaluation approach, process and findings

and for evaluators to have appropriate access to people and resources. It is also necessary to ensure that evaluation approaches are consistent with social work practice and reflect the real world of residences. This may mean the use of more innovative, action-oriented and participatory approaches to evaluation.

Evaluations of Residential Services need to take mixed method approaches that generate both qualitative and quantitative data. Evaluations (especially process evaluations) require qualitative data that is rich enough to capture the complexity of relationships and other factors that contribute to the way services work and

the way young people respond to them (and the way they have responded to past interventions). This means that case studies may be more appropriate for identifying and

understanding the multitude of variables that have contributed to the individual circumstances of young people in residences.

At the same time, there is a continuing expectation from some stakeholders, including the Treasury, that outcome evaluations provide evidence based on measurable, quantifiable data of positive achievements. Further, there is also some expectation that the data used will demonstrate the extent to which the achievements can be specifically attributed to the services being evaluated. For evaluations of Residential Services, this may mean seeking to incorporate some comparative analysis based on the outcomes of young people with similar attributes and experiences receiving different interventions (by Child, Youth and Family and/or others) or no interventions.

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In commissioning evaluation, it is necessary to consider the difficulties evaluators may face in accessing useful and appropriate comparative data about young people in other programmes. Experience here and overseas shows that comparative analysis is difficult to carry out in evaluations of youth services given a mix of ethical and practical limitations.

International best practice that informs Child, Youth and Family Residential Services includes the involvement of family/whānau, processes to ensure quality service delivery, effective needs assessment and placement, wraparound service delivery and the provision of culturally appropriate services. Research and evaluation of adolescent Residential Services carried out overseas provide evidence of the value of these components of best practice. Child, Youth and Family staff expressed enthusiasm for New Zealand based research and evaluation that can show the extent of any links between particular components of Residential Services best practice and achievement of outcomes.

The separation of Care and Protection and Youth Justice is a main element of the Youth Services Strategy, the Residential Services Strategy and various operational documents. This separation is coupled with the development of larger residential institutions. Evaluations need to consider the impacts of these changes on the way that services are delivered and the achievement of positive outcomes (for example, whether residential size matters and, if so, how). These evaluation findings need to be analysed in the context of the research and or/policy documents that underpinned these changes.

Conclusions

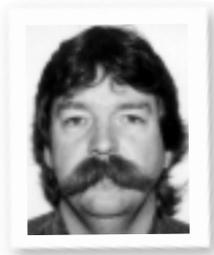
The next steps in the development of the framework require it to be:

- ∴ further elaborated and refined as the delivery of Residential Services proceeds in line with changes outlined in the Residential Services Strategy
- ∴ informed by the ongoing experiences and findings of current Specialist Residential Services and future Residential Services Strategy evaluations
- ∴ informed, as now, by the views of Child, Youth and Family staff as they become more familiar with and interested in evaluation and its potential to contribute to improvements in service delivery.

The framework should:

- ∴ reflect the needs and expectation of stakeholders outside of Residential Services, including the Minister, the Ministry of Social Development, Treasury, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, communities and family/whānau interests
- ∴ contribute to providing the best services for young people.

The next steps for Child, Youth and Family involve the application of the framework in the design of evaluations of Residential Services. Comments on this work in progress are welcome and can be sent to Alan Geraghty, Operations Manager, Residential Services at Child, Youth and Family, PO Box 2160, Wellington. 

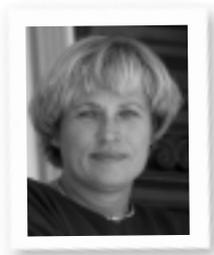


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Julie Warren is a director of the Centre for Research, Evaluation and Social Assessment.





Youth offending – a police perspective

Chris Graveson considers the work of Youth Justice Co-ordinators

Thirteen years after it was introduced, the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act (the Act) is still considered radical internationally. New Zealand has failed to appreciate what it has developed and to use this forward-thinking legislation to its full potential. I was appointed the National Co-ordinator of Youth Aid in 1995. After about six months I came to the conclusion that the most effective strategy for all involved in youth justice would be to use and practise the Act as it was intended.

Implementing the Act

There are a number of key elements to the Act which are central to its effectiveness:

- ∴ Keeping young people out of the formal youth justice process. Much young people's offending is now dealt with by Youth Aid by way of warnings and diversion. Looking back, it is hard to believe the minor offences that were dealt with by the Youth Court.
- ∴ Timeframes are now important, and these have been incorporated into the Act so those who offend are dealt with as soon as possible after the offence. Whenever I see poor practice, there are always bad timeframes.
- ∴ The principles set out in s.5 of the Act recognise and acknowledge the importance of the child's or young person's family, hapū or iwi. These whānau members should participate in the decision-making, but at the same time accept some responsibility for the offending and how to prevent further offending.

- ∴ Victims' rights are recognised, as their importance to the decision-making process is something that no other Act provided. The public should have been made more aware of this provision.
- ∴ Interventions are tailored to meet the needs of the young person and their family, the victim and the community, and the intervention can be reviewed should circumstances change.
- ∴ The Youth Court is provided with good information and options as a result of the Family Group Conference (FGC).

When all of these elements come together with competent practitioners, the effectiveness of this Act is evident.

The Act has empowered families, and the vast majority of families are capable of dealing with the offending committed by their children. Families (including aunts, uncles, grandparents etc) want their children to develop into meaningful members of the community. I know from my experience of fathers who have been involved in the justice system that they do not want the same to occur to their children.

A number of families implement their own intervention prior to contact from Youth Aid, and it is evident that very little, if any, Police input is required because of the intervention of the family. On occasions the family may require some guidance but they are still very capable of

dealing with the issues, including resolving any victim issues.

Not only were families empowered, but the Act also allowed for a wide range of interventions to occur, such as warnings, alternative action, FGCs and the Youth Court.

Young people and restorative justice

International commentators labelled the FGC process with a term not previously heard in New Zealand – restorative justice. However, the FGC is only part of the restorative justice process.

It is highly significant that Police are now able to deal with about 80% of offending without the intervention of an FGC or the Youth Court. This shows that most young people do not need formal interventions, and it indicates the effectiveness of Police working directly with the young person, their family and, when required, other community agencies. This confirms the research that young people should be kept out of the formal youth justice system whenever possible, and the huge cost saving as Child, Youth and Family and the Courts do not have to be involved.

Prior to the introduction of the Act a large number of young people were being dealt with in the Court process unnecessarily and this is supported by recent research showing that 80% of children and young persons who offend only commit one offence. It must, however, be recognised that there is a very small group of hardcore serious offenders who require a disproportionate amount of resources and time to be spent on them by the youth justice system.

For effective outcomes to be achieved for the victim, the young person, the family and the communities, the key agencies – Police, Child, Youth and Family, Youth Advocates and Courts –

must work in a professional manner using the objects and principles of the Act. This is achieved by holding the young person accountable, working with the family and victim and implementing a plan that is achievable and appropriate. The plan must be monitored and as soon as it becomes evident that it is not being adhered to, an immediate intervention must occur.

Ensuring the effectiveness of FGCs

From my observations, effectiveness has the following elements:

- : Matters are dealt with in a timely manner. It is pointless trying to deal with offending six months after it has been established that the young person is the offender. The sooner the intervention occurs, the more effective it will be.
- : Victims are well informed and supported. A well-informed and supported victim will be a more willing participant at an FGC. If the victim comes well prepared, they will have given considerable thought to what they want to say and the outcomes they desire. Good victim participation is a key component to the youth justice process. I believe the greatest myth about victims is that they want vengeance. In fact, it is well demonstrated how forgiving victims can be, but they can also be very angry if they believe they have not been well treated by the youth justice process.
- : FGCs are well convened. The crucial element of the FGC is convening and identifying the key people who should be present – not just the young person and their extended family but also other key people in their life. Prior to the FGC everyone should be made well aware of the process so they understand what will be happening and what will be required of them.
- : Good plans are implemented and monitored. FGC plans must be easily understood. The plan must specify why the FGC was held, who is responsible for each element of the plan and what will occur if the plan is not adhered to.

: Intervention occurs as soon as there are indications that the plan is not being adhered to. The key object of the Act is to hold children and young people accountable for their offending. If the agreed plan is not adhered to, an intervention must occur. Otherwise the youth justice process will lose credibility and the young person has not been held accountable for their offending.

The role of the Youth Justice Co-ordinator

I have come to the very firm view that the Youth Justice Co-ordinator is the pivotal person in the youth justice process.

When there is competent practice by a Youth Justice Co-ordinator, there are normally fewer matters referred to a FGC and a flow-on effect is that there tends to be a higher level of alternative action. (Police Youth Aid need to be well resourced so this can be achieved.) Plans are closely monitored, conferences are professionally run, and invariably there is a decline in the numbers of young people before the Youth Court, a decline in the levels of serious offending and less demand for residential facilities.

I have reached this conclusion after observing practice across New Zealand and seeing the figures from the practitioners working in these areas. When Police figures drop and the numbers appearing in Youth Court decline by 50% (Institute of Criminology Research Team, 2001), it becomes evident that that these practitioners are very effective. I see evaluations of the achievements of various youth justice programmes, yet from my perspective and observations over the years

a high standard of practice by youth justice practitioners is without doubt the most effective programme available.

Another by-product of good practices by the agencies is that the community groups are willing to come aboard as they see the leadership provided by this good practice and have confidence that they will receive the support they require from the agencies.

By comparison, the by-product of poor practice is that well-intentioned people or groups set up a programme and in a short period of time are overwhelmed by the numbers of young offenders taking part, so that other problems occur. Some programmes should be established for a finite period, otherwise programme co-ordinators may be required to find young people to fit into their programmes.

There is a clear trend that people are coming to the attention of the youth justice system at a younger age and the level of violence is

increasing. This means these young people are within the youth justice system over a longer period than previously. This is an international trend which needs to be

acknowledged in this country so that its implications for the youth justice process can be taken into account in planning.

There will always be a small number of individuals who are seriously disturbed because of previous serious abuse which makes rehabilitation very difficult and, regrettably, many will go on to the adult justice system.

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However, we should never overlook the fact that by good practice we can make a difference by minimising their offending, thus enhancing the community through fewer people becoming victims of their actions in committing crime.

Children and young persons become involved in the youth justice system because they have committed an offence, and how appropriately and effectively they, their families and the victim are dealt with will have a huge bearing on the long-term good for all involved.

I hold in very high regard the professional practitioners from Police, Child, Youth and Family, the courts, Youth Advocates and other community members who contribute to positive outcomes for the children and young persons and their families, communities and victims. □



Inspector Chris Graveson is the National Co-ordinator of Police Youth Aid

REFERENCE:

Institute of Criminology Research Team, 2001. *Police Youth Diversion, Report to Youth Aid Officers*. Wellington Institute of Criminology, Victoria University of Wellington.



The role of job analysis when selecting caregivers

Jo Sanft describes a new system to assess prospective foster caregivers

Often the tasks involved in a job, such as that of a foster caregiver looking after young people for Child, Youth and Family, are taken for granted. But what is really involved in caring for young people placed in foster care situations? It is a job that not everyone can do and best intentions to do a good job are not enough.

Since many of the children/young persons already have attachment issues, it is important to keep the number of placements to a minimum. One way of lowering the repeat placement rate is to understand what knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAOs) are required to be a Child, Youth and Family foster caregiver. What are the essential KSAOs required at the start of the job and what KSAOs can be gained over time by training? This information assists in the selection process of new recruits and identifies areas that need support and training.

Initial background research from traditional sources like the US-based O-Net (Occupational Information Network), an occupational profiler regarded as a comprehensive database, showed no match for an equivalent to a New Zealand foster care position. Another way of obtaining information on the essential KSAOs for this position is by a job analysis directly relevant to the New Zealand work environment.

A job analysis is used to gain information about the job within an organisation and should describe the tasks or activities, the outcome, working conditions, health and safety considerations and work schedules that characterise the job. This information is a useful human resource management tool for selection, compensation, training performance appraisals and career development (Gatewood and Field, 2001).

This article describes a research exercise in which a job analysis was carried out on a group of caregivers, with the aim of compiling information to assist in the selection of further caregivers and to identify specific training needs.

For the purposes of this exercise the position of specialist caregiver was chosen as it was part of a successful pilot programme at Child, Youth and Family, Tauranga with high and complex needs (HCN) clients. HCN clients are children/young persons with developmental and/or mental health problems which manifest in extreme behavioural problems. In this pilot it was felt that more information was needed on the nature of the specialist caregiver position, and on the KSAOs likely to increase the successful outcome of a placement.

The specific specialist caregivers whose job was analysed for this study had held this position for

approximately 15 months at the time the research was undertaken. The job was part of a pilot “wrap around” programme to provide one-on-one care for HCN clients. The caregivers have a vital role within the interdisciplinary and multi-agency team which includes a Child, Youth and Family caseworker, psychologists, a psychiatrist, a doctor, a Special Education Services representative, a teacher, respite caregivers, a therapist and a Family Court advocate. This team’s function is to set up a developmental and treatment programme and monitor the progress of the individual child. The position of the specialist caregiver is that of primary caregiver for the child/young person while implementing the behavioural treatment programme. The success of the Tauranga pilot programme meant that more such programmes were likely to be put in place. Therefore the organisation needed some data on what the specialist caregiver job actually entailed.

The job incumbents and the interview process

The research was undertaken using the subject matter expert (SME) model, in which a small group of caregivers and management staff (case supervisor, practice manager and Special Services staff) were seen as the SMEs. Both Māori and non-Māori were represented in the group, as were both males and females. Four of the five caregivers had been through a selection process specifically for the placement of an HCN child. The fifth had been selected as a foster caregiver and was caring for a child due to enter the HCN client programme.

During initial interviews (held in their home settings) all five caregivers were required to identify tasks involved in their job, the approximate amount of time spent during the week or month doing the task, and the KSAOs

they felt were related to each task. The 35 initial tasks identified included “accompanying child on walks”, “teach child personal hygiene” and “attend supervision”.

All caregivers were required to rate the tasks on frequency (how often they were performed), importance of the task for the success of the job and the proficiency level they perceived a new person should be at when starting the job. They were also required to rate KSAOs on trainability, proficiency required at the start of the job, and the importance of the KSAOs to the success of the job. Management representatives also rated the tasks and KSAOs on proficiency, importance and trainability, to verify and cross-check the rating of the caregivers. Management are generally likely to be more accurate than incumbents in matching the KSAOs with tasks (Gatewood and Field, 2001).

Data and statistical analysis

The task statements were broken down into the following five core functions, which were rated on criticality to the job:

1. Providing the client’s daily physiological and safety needs
2. Attending to the client’s developmental needs within the framework of the programme
3. Maintaining personal support within the framework of the job
4. Meeting programme administration and implementation needs
5. Developing the client’s social skills.

The results rated daily care as the most important part of the job followed by the developmental needs and programme requirements, which is perhaps not surprising. Next came maintaining personal support, which included a high level of communication and

support within the relationship and attending supervision and support meetings. Developing the child's social skills was not seen as a priority for this client group. This may reflect the developmental stage of these children on their individual programmes.

Knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAOs)

The initial set of 55 KSAOs drawn from the interviews was seen as too cumbersome to be an effective human resource management tool, and included several very similar definitions.

Accordingly, this initial set was regrouped into the following 14 categories which were rated in order of importance:

1. Commitment to the programme (this included being a primary caregiver available 24 hours a day and being committed to the philosophy of the programme)
2. Self-care (self management, personal relationships, stress management)
3. Parenting skills (skills in positive parenting, modeling desirable behaviour)
4. Personal qualities (persistence, resilience, sense of humour)
5. Change management (ability to work with the child's ever-changing needs to change one's own patterns of behaviour)
6. Behaviour management (ability to manage high arousal states and to set and maintain boundaries)
7. Teamwork ability (ability to work as part of a team, to be challenged and to challenge others)
8. Monitoring and observation (sensitivity to problems)
9. Policy and procedure (adherence to Child, Youth and Family policies on foster parenting and discipline)

10. Decision-making and co-ordination (critical thinking, planning, prioritising)
11. Child development (attention to child's human development and mental health)
12. Communication (written, verbal and listening skills)
13. Literacy and numeracy (high school level of English and mathematics)
14. Understanding of relevant culture (knowledge of child's culture and language to a level appropriate to the needs of the individual child).

In general, the first five categories above were seen as either desirable or not trainable at the start of the job, due to the time and cost involved in training an individual. The subsequent categories (communication and literacy skills) were seen as trainable.

"Self-care" included the skill to identify and generate responses to stressful situations, ability to manage one's own emotions, willingness to attend ongoing training, and ability to establish and maintain healthy personal relationships. Although stress management was seen as trainable, both incumbents and management saw it as a desirable skill for the caregiver to possess at the start of the job.

Personal qualities like persistence, patience, stability and a sense of humour were considered important, as was the ability of the caregiver to work in a changing environment to change their own patterns of behaviour.

What can this information be used for?

There are a range of uses for a job analysis, from development of selection tools to appraising the incumbent's performance, identifying resources needed for a job, and

meeting the training and development needs of incumbents (see Figure 1). However, the research described in this article focused on using the job analysis as a selection tool.

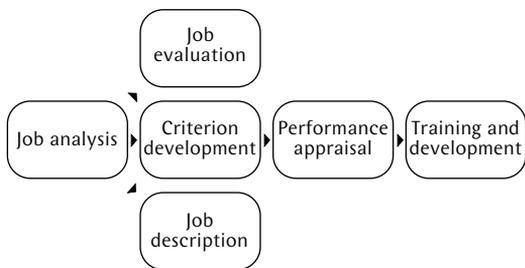


Figure 1. The relationship between job analysis and other critical human resource functions (Landy, 1989)

Although the results of the job analysis are in the early stages of being tested in the specialist caregiver position, they have already been generalised as a framework to assist in a stage of the selection process for a family home caregiver position. In both settings the core competencies of the caregivers crossed cultural boundaries and provided robust and useful data.

Recruitment

Now the tasks and KSAOs of the job have been identified, the recruitment process for new caregivers can have a focus. Formal interview questions, reference checks and pre-training selection programmes can be developed to identify and test for the specific KSAOs required at the start of the job.

If the principle that past behaviour is a predictor of future behaviour is used (and most applicants have previous experience in child-rearing), then questions can ascertain what the applicant has done in past situations. The tasks themselves (such as de-escalating high levels of arousal twice a day on average) can be used as a base for the questions and if examples given by the

applicant are inadequate, additional probing questions can be asked.

The information resulting from the research was put to the test with caregivers themselves. One of the incumbents later opted out of the programme which, from the information gathered during the research project, was a predictable outcome. This incumbent showed insufficient commitment to the programme philosophy, and rated three of the four top categories low, compared with the other incumbents. This person had other qualities, which means that further foster care placements will happen but not with clients in the HCN client group.

Trainability

With the exception of parenting skills, few of the KSAOs in the top six categories were considered trainable, as most were categorised as inherent abilities. These included having a sense of humour, a good personal relationship or a commitment to the philosophy of the intervention programme. Skills such as being able to handle high arousal states were considered trainable but desirable at the start of employment. However, some people may not be trainable (at least in the short term) in areas such as managing high arousal states, as past personal experience of abuse may affect their response.

Lewin (cited in Pasmore, 2001) argues that a person's individual characteristics need to be considered, as behaviour is a function of both personality (the unique organisation of thought, feeling and behaviours that defines an individual and determines that person's pattern of interaction with the environment) and the environment (Gatewood and Field, 2001). Some jobs (such as that of checkout operator) are

more cognitively based, requiring application of specific skills, knowledge and predetermined action. However, in the role of caregiver there are a number of ways of carrying out the task to reach the desired outcome. It is in this sort of job that personality (a non-trainable quality) seems related to job performance (Gatewood and Field, 2001).

Research by Landy and Vasey (1988, cited in Landy, 1989) has shown that length of experience in the job does affect the reported task outcome, so when doing a job analysis a cross-section of staff experience is required for an accurate picture. In this research the time involved in tasks did vary depending on the age of the child and the length of time they had been on the programme. An example was teaching a child how to eat using the appropriate utensils or how to maintain personal hygiene. The length of time this task took depended on the child's prior experience. Once the initial task had been taught, then the role for the caregiver was that of monitor rather than teacher. In a job where tasks change as the child develops, the KSAOs need to reflect these changes. In this case the job analysis itself highlighted change management as an important yet non-trainable competency required of incumbents.

The job analysis outcomes were generalised to identify the training needs and trainability of prospective caregivers who had been through the existing selection process. Several training issues not identified using the selection process were brought to the selectors' attention, as were several concerns in the non-trainable areas. In this case Child, Youth and Family could ensure support was in place for the applicants when

they took up the position, therefore heading off possible later problems.

Crossing cultural boundaries

Landy and Vasey's (1988) research on job analysis reported no difference in reported activities across three cultures, nor across educational levels (Landy, 1989).

In the context of this research, the most important categories of programme commitment – self-care, parenting, personal qualities and change management – showed up as critical for success. The job analysis shows the importance of the applicant having these KSAOs, not that there is a single right or wrong way to demonstrate them.

It is more likely that concerns in the area of cultural bias will arise from the process of measuring the task performance and KSAOs. The

ability to manage change is important; however, the specific techniques of adapting to change may be different for each individual and culture. It is therefore important that those using

the job analysis in the criterion development and performance appraisal stages understand the cultural differences among their HCN clients and caregiver applicants.

"Understanding of the child's cultural background" was rated low on the scale of KSAOs and was seen as trainable. This may be due to the level of understanding already present in the current caregivers.

Implications for practice

Before recruiting or measuring performance and appropriate behaviours, the elementary tasks of

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a job need to be defined. The job analysis provides this definition and can also rate tasks on their level of criticality for the job. By using the SME method of job analysis, input is provided from those carrying out the job, rather than from some pre-set international standard which may not match the specific requirements, or from some outdated specification which fails to meet the changing needs of the client group.

In an area of recruitment when potential foster caregivers are not rushing through the door, selection still needs to ensure that the appropriate people are accepted and have the essential KSAOs to perform the task. Identifying KSAOs for each type of caregiver role (foster, family home, specialist) helps identify the differences as well as similarities. An applicant may suit one of these jobs but not have the requirements for another. Identifying the KSAOs of the applicants and matching them with those required for the specific caregiver position lowers the probability of a mismatch between client and caregiver.

It could be argued that in the selection process it is the non-trainable KSAOs that are sought in an applicant. If the person has most of these non-trainable KSAOs, then training in the other areas will provide a caregiver who is more likely to prove effective with the required support. In the case of the specialist caregiver, commitment to the philosophy of the programme, self-care, parenting, personal qualities and change management were the areas of core competencies required. Some of these core competencies also apply to other caregiver positions. If caregivers are lacking in some of the

non-trainable areas identified for the job, then they may either be offered support in those areas, selected for an alternative role (such as short-term foster care rather than long-term specialist caregiving) or not selected at all.

Accountability and performance are always difficult areas to measure in the social service setting. The programme described in this study included ongoing monitoring of the Child, Youth and Family client and regular supervision of the caregivers. The client's progress was the general

measure used to evaluate performance of the programme and the placement (and therefore of the caregiver). However, this evaluation can introduce confounding variables

unrelated to the direct performance of the caregivers. Knowing just what the job entails enables a fair performance appraisal system to be set up. If task statements are written with an expected output, the appraisal process is simplified. (However, I acknowledge this kind of appraisal is still not as easy as it sounds.)

From this research, using the KSAOs appears to provide a good guide to what to look for in prospective caregivers and the areas which need training and development. Training plans for caregivers can be developed to meet shortfalls in areas such as knowledge of mental health issues and Child, Youth and Family policy and procedure. In the case of the specialist caregiver, all caregivers agreed that knowledge of these areas was especially important.

The results of this study appear to cross cultural boundaries in identifying KSAOs and job tasks. An example is teaching a child table manners. All

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When recruiting, the whānau support interview process and structured interviews can be used to avoid discrimination
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those involved in the research expressed a norm for New Zealand society in this area. However, the way a caregiver teaches the child to reach this social norm is subjective. Those measuring performance therefore need to be careful not to use pre-determined criteria to measure tasks and KSAOs which discriminate against certain cultures. When recruiting, the whānau support interview process and structured interviews can be used to avoid such discrimination. For the performance appraisal process, the job incumbents themselves might be asked what a fair measure would be. These proposed applications of the job analysis offer scope for further research projects.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank the specialist caregivers, the staff of Tauranga Specialist Services and Tauranga Child, Youth and Family staff who participated in the research for their valuable contribution. Thanks also to Dr Paul Taylor for his guidance on the project.



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Legal Note

AN UNUSUAL, AND INTENSELY PRIVATE, BEAST

Stewart Bartlett reviews the unique legal status of Family Group Conferences

The Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989 affirms the residual right of the state to actively involve itself in family life under certain circumstances. The right is residual as the primary right (and therefore responsibility) rests with a child's "family, whānau, hapū, iwi and family group" (see ss.4(b), 13(b) and 208 (c)(ii)). The reserve nature of the state's role, however, can never be mistaken for an inability to usurp the rights of the family where the state believes it is in the child's best interests to do so.

Instead, the Act requires the state (especially through Child, Youth and Family) to try all reasonable means to work with family, support family, communicate with family and join with family in making decisions about children and young persons who are alleged to be in need of care or protection or who have allegedly committed offences. It might be stretching the point too far to suggest that the legislation creates a partnership between family and state, but it certainly does require the state, the family and others with a legitimate interest in the welfare of the child to work towards an agreed position about the child's future. The formal vehicle in which this collaborative activity takes place is the Family Group Conference (FGC).

The FGC is an unusual beast. Each individual conference exists as a separate statutory entity, independent in nature, bound only by the statute under which it works. Such entities are by definition neither state nor family, yet their constituent members are primarily representatives of those two parties. They exist only ephemerally, making decisions about the child in whose interests they were convened and then effectively ceasing to be.

It is my belief that the plain words of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989 and the philosophy of the legislation make it clear that FGCs are able to perform those functions and tasks given to it by statute and cannot, even should all members of the Conference agree, step outside the ambit of those functions.

Confidentiality and privilege

FGCs are required to be intensely private affairs. It is an offence to publish the proceedings of a Conference, and the non-negotiable nature of that privacy is reinforced by the fact that, in contrast to the rules applying to court proceedings under the same legislation, there is no ability to seek leave to publish such proceedings. It should be

noted that there is an extremely limited ability to publish statistical information and bona fide material relating to FGCs.

The sanctity of FGCs is further confirmed by the absolute injunction against the disclosure to the court “of any information, statement, or admission disclosed or made in the course of an FGC.”

The policy of the legislation is abundantly clear and unequivocal. The balance of interests represented between the public interest in allowing justice to be served through court processes and allowing the media to report on noteworthy matters has been adjudged by the legislation as being secondary to the public interest in allowing participants in a FGC to speak frankly and openly about the matters at hand.

The only vehicle by which an FGC can communicate with the court and with other persons in possession of a proper interest in its proceedings is through the record made by a Care and Protection or Youth Justice Co-ordinator.

It is my view that the policy of limited disclosure referred to above also permeates the rules under which those records are created and (to the extent that an argument might be raised that those rules are not plain on their face) require that they are approached with those interests in mind.

The written record

There is no germane difference between the rules pertaining to Youth Justice Conferences and Care and Protection Conferences. Sections 28 and 258 outline the functions of an FGC. The

generic feature of the FGC’s functions is to “make... decisions or recommendations and to formulate... plans in relation to the child or young person.”

There are limitations on the circumstances in which an FGC can exercise these powers but I will not go into that issue here.

The Co-ordinator is given the task of making a written record of “the details of the decisions and recommendations made and the plans formulated by the conference” (ss.29 and 262). He or she is given no power to record anything else. Accordingly, Co-ordinators have no power to digress into recording such things as internal Conference disagreements, minority points of views, the attitude of the young person to his or her victims or any matter other than the Conference’s decisions, recommendations or plans.

The Conference cannot invest the Co-ordinator with powers to record matters that the statute does not empower the Co-ordinator to record. Such matters stay irrevocably unpublished and undisclosed, a requirement which accords with the absolute protections afforded by the confidentiality and privilege provisions of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989.

I recognise that Co-ordinators will, from time to time, feel themselves under pressure to disclose, whether by way of record or otherwise, matters that they have no power to disclose. Perhaps there might also be, in some areas of New Zealand, practices that have developed whereby information about Conference deliberations is

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shared, despite the statutory limitations on a Co-ordinator's powers.

In my opinion, Co-ordinators (and for that matter any other persons who attend Conferences) must be scrupulous to ensure that they do not disclose information which they have not been empowered by statute to disclose. The danger that is surely faced by a Co-ordinator exceeding their powers is that of having breached the confidentiality and – if relevant – the privilege clauses of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989.

None of the above in any way can be construed to suggest that Co-ordinators are precluded from recording in full and explicit detail the decisions, recommendations and plans made or formulated by a Conference. However, the temptation to better inform third parties as to what else might be of interest to them, even should the Conference be unanimously in favour of such a course of action, must be resisted. □



Stewart Bartlett is chief legal advisor at Child, Youth and Family National Office



Book reviews

THE GIRLS IN THE GANG

By Glennis Dennehy and Greg Newbold

Publisher: Reed Publishing (2001)

rrp \$29.95

Reviewed by Sue Robins

This book is the result of a thesis completed by Glennis Dennehy. The partner of a gang member for over 10 years, Glennis was subjected to increasingly severe assaults by him. In 1991 he was convicted and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. This was a turning point for her and led to significant life changes.

After returning to school as an adult student and completing sixth-form certificate, Glennis enrolled in university in 1994, completing her BA (Hons) majoring in sociology, and decided to complete her MA thesis on women in gangs.

The stated objective of this book is to provide a further dimension to what is already known about domestic violence, and I think it achieves this purpose well, particularly with respect to New Zealand.

Both readable and compelling, this book covers a range of topics over eight chapters. There are the individual stories of the women who participated in the project, the role of women within gangs, the dynamics of gang life and information on the history and development of gangs in New Zealand. Each chapter is summarised and links the personal stories to societal and historical

factors, which I found useful.

Some of the stories make very disturbing but believable reading, particularly those relating to the children. A reference is made to the so-called “family days” which the children attend. The purpose of these is to “precondition obedience and prepare them for future membership of the gang.” Recently I was involved with a case in which a 12-year-old child was rejected by his mother because his behaviours reminded her so much of his father, a patched gang member. His mother had moved away from the relationship with the father (a situation very similar to the author’s own experience), but was now struggling to cope with the effects of this relationship and lifestyle on her children.

This book highlights a range of factors that social workers should take into consideration when working with families who are involved with gangs. For example, how best can we engage and work with women who live in fear of breaking the “no narking” rule and who fear for their very survival, not only from violence by their partners but also by other men and women associated with the gang? How can we involve extended family who may have disowned their adult children because of their lifestyle and are too scared to care for their grandchildren?

As a social worker, I found myself reflecting on my own experiences with the mothers in particular, and thinking that I may have worked differently if I had known more about the dynamics involved.

I believe this book is a useful tool for social workers and is a valuable resource for any office.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE FOR JUVENILES: CONFERENCING, MEDIATION AND CIRCLES

Edited by Allison Morris and Gabrielle Maxwell

Publisher: Hart Publishing, Oxford
rrp \$127.95

Reviewed by Joanne Hempleman

Restorative Justice for Juveniles considers a number of different restorative justice models and their underpinnings. The book is divided into four parts: Part One, Setting the Scene, introduces at length the concept of restorative justice. Part Two, Describing Restorative Practices, looks at the international implementation of restorative justice. Conferencing, victim-offender mediation and circle sentencing in Australia, New Zealand, England, South Africa, Europe, Canada and USA are discussed. Part Three, Critical Issues in Restorative Justice, considers victims, Police-facilitated conferences, Aboriginal youth and Family Group Conferences and re-offending. Part Four, What Next for Restorative Justice?, sums up the information provided in the book and editors Morris and Maxwell offer conclusions as to what works when implementing restorative justice.

Restorative Justice for Juveniles is a useful text for anyone undertaking research and wanting to consider the implementation of restorative justice practices internationally.

At the beginning of each chapter there is a description of what the chapter offers.

Throughout the chapter the reader is directed to other areas of the book where a particular subject is also discussed. This allows the reader

to choose specific areas of interest, rather than having to read the whole book. As expected, with a book comprising the work of many authors, some chapters are easier to digest than others. There is also a list of references at the conclusion of each chapter for further reading.

The chapter by Maxwell and Morris, Family Group Conferences and Re-offending, would be useful for Child, Youth and Family co-ordinators convening Youth Justice conferences. This chapter outlines characteristics of conferences which are likely to be associated with less re-offending. The last chapter, also by Maxwell and Morris, is called Implementing Restorative Justice: What Works? This chapter is also useful as it considers the necessary factors to implement restorative justice best practice.

For practitioners of restorative justice the book provides the opportunity to consider the different ways that restorative justice is implemented internationally. Overall, this book is fairly user-friendly, if seen as a text from which different sections of interest can be read, without having to read the whole book.

CHILD VICTIMS OF HOMICIDE

By Christine Alder and Ken Polk

Publisher: Cambridge University Press, Victoria
(2001)
rrp \$39.95

Reviewed by Dianne Farrell

To provide insight into the risk factors for homicide against children, Alder and Polk, criminologists at Melbourne University, draw on existing research as well as their own analysis of child homicides reported to the Coroner for the State of Victoria between 1985 and 1995.

This book is probably not for the casual reader, densely packed as it is with case examples and scholarly analysis. However, its contents are very relevant to those involved in the prevention and investigation of child homicide and to the ongoing public and media concern about violence against children.

The authors' approach of placing homicidal behaviour in the context of interpersonal, social and gender issues provides a practical framework for understanding perpetrators' behaviour and potential risks to children.

Alder and Polk find that lethal violence against children is unique in that it is committed in similar proportions by men and women, in contrast with male perpetration of most other violent crimes. The greatest risk periods for children are early in life in their own homes and as teenagers outside their homes. Sources of risk vary according to context, age and sex of both offender and victim.

An example of female-specific patterns of killing is neonaticide, the killing of a child within 24 hours of birth. All the known perpetrators in the authors' sample were the babies' mothers, apparently fearful of their pregnancies becoming known. None of the mothers appeared to have psychiatric disturbance either historically or around the time of pregnancy and birth. Similarly, the authors observe that in cases of killings in the course of postnatal depression, mothers' circumstances appeared more relevant than hormonal or other physiological factors.

Killings by women are almost entirely of their natural children, dispelling what the authors call the "Cinderella myth" of evil stepmothers. Fewer biological fathers kill their own children, but those homicides that do occur take place most often when the biological fathers are separated, or fear separation, from their children's mother.

Most killings of younger children by males are perpetrated by men who are in de facto relationships and who fly into a rage against the apparently disobedient children of their partners.

Killings outside the family are mostly by males of other males in the context of adolescent men fighting each other in "honour contests", homicide in the course of another crime and accidental shootings. Sexually related killings of female children and adolescents also form a significant proportion of male-perpetrated homicides.

The authors also report cases that do not fit a pattern, for example, apparently loving and caring parents who starved their child to death as a result of their unconventional nutritional beliefs.

This review hardly does credit to the immense wealth of detail contained in this book, which is well worth consulting for those who have an interest.

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Social Work Now

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