SUBMISSION

ON

Every child
thrives, belongs, achieves

Ka whai oranga, ka whai wāhi, ka whai taumata ia tamaiti
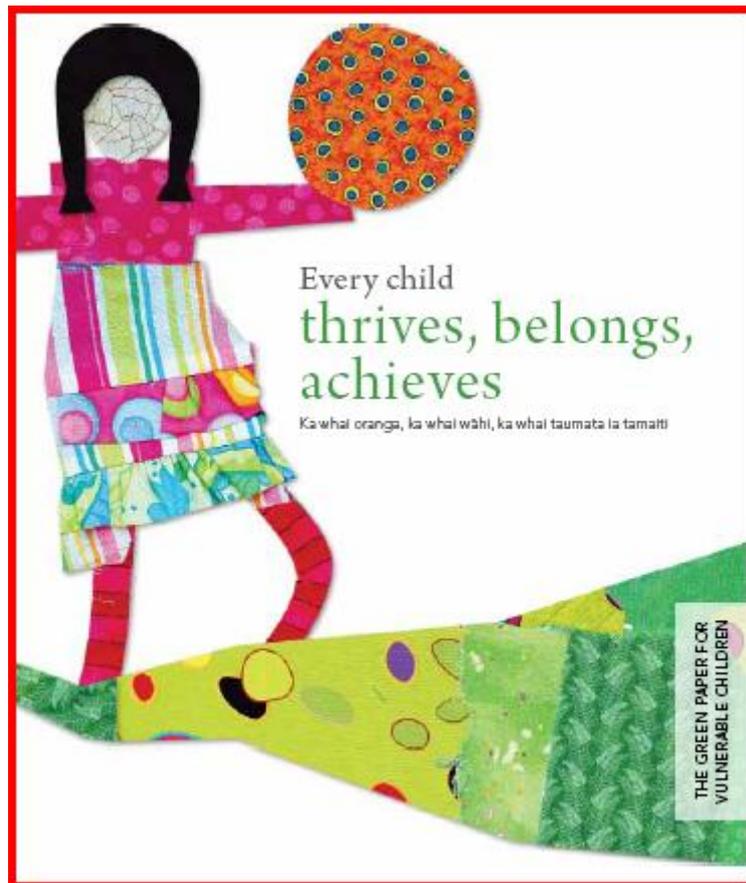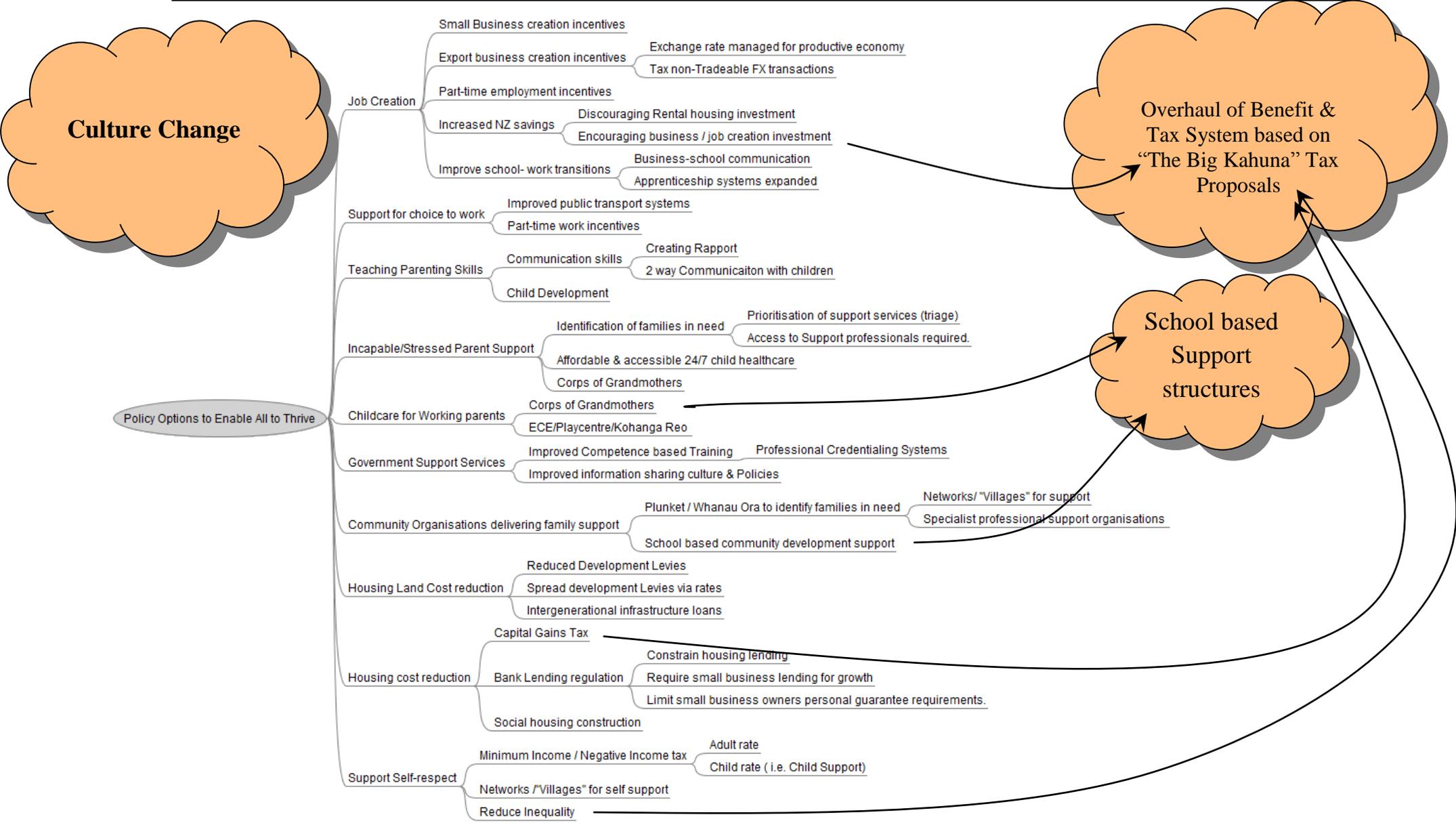
THE GREEN PAPER FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN

BY ANALYTICA

Prepared for
Analytica
by J H Pearce

25 February 2012

An Example of an Integrated set of Policy Options for Consideration in

Enabling children …………..to Thrive, to Belong and to Achieve.

Culture Change

Overhaul of Benefit &
Tax System based on
"The Big Kahuna" Tax
Proposals

School based
Support
structures

Policy Options to Enable All to Thrive

Job Creation
- Small Business creation incentives
- Export business creation incentives
  - Exchange rate managed for productive economy
  - Tax non-Tradeable FX transactions
- Part-time employment incentives
- Increased NZ savings
  - Discouraging Rental housing investment
  - Encouraging business / job creation investment
- Improve school- work transitions
  - Business-school communication
  - Apprenticeship systems expanded

Support for choice to work
- Improved public transport systems
- Part-time work incentives

Teaching Parenting Skills
- Communication skills
  - Creating Rapport
  - 2 way Communicaiton with children
- Child Development

Incapable/Stressed Parent Support
- Identification of families in need
  - Prioritisation of support services (triage)
  - Access to Support professionals required.
- Affordable & accessible 24/7 child healthcare
- Corps of Grandmothers

Childcare for Working parents
- Corps of Grandmothers
- ECE/Playcentre/Kohanga Reo

Government Support Services
- Improved Competence based Training
  - Professional Credentialing Systems
- Improved information sharing culture & Policies

Community Organisations delivering family support
- Plunket / Whanau Ora to identify families in need
  - Networks/ "Villages" for support
  - Specialist professional support organisations
- School based community development support

Housing Land Cost reduction
- Reduced Development Levies
- Spread development Levies via rates
- Intergenerational infrastructure loans

Housing cost reduction
- Capital Gains Tax
- Bank Lending regulation
  - Constrain housing lending
  - Require small business lending for growth
  - Limit small business owners personal guarantee requirements.
- Social housing construction

Support Self-respect
- Minimum Income / Negative Income tax
  - Adult rate
  - Child rate (i.e. Child Support)
- Networks /"Villages" for self support
- Reduce Inequality

Submissions on Government Green paper – Vulnerable Children[1]

1. Executive Summary

The Green Paper articulates a Vision for all children "to Thrive, to Belong, to Achieve". It seeks comments, information, and opinion as to how best to achieve this vision. It sets out detailed questions to elicit this feedback in 4 broad areas.

What is missing, in our view, is a series of congruent "big picture" policy objectives for the nation in meeting its obligation to its children. The diagram on page (i) shows an illustrative example of the kind of big picture of integrated policy actions we believe is required.

We believe the scope of the Green Paper is too narrow to elicit the most effective policy solutions to achieve its desired outcome- all New Zealand children thriving, belonging, and achieving.

We submit that enabling all New Zealand children to Thrive, to Belong, and to Achieve, requires a shift in our national cultural attitudes to children, and so to family. It requires acceptance of the individual responsibility for our own children – the responsibility of parenthood- and of responsibility for other children – community awareness, community support, and creating equal opportunity for adults of all backgrounds.

Effective policy action requires addressing this cultural shift.

To facilitate consideration of our submission, we submit the following specific submissions arising from answers to the Green Paper questions.
• A Broad review of all Government agencies is required, not only for a child centred approach, but also to identify where funding to more privileged sections of society could be re-allocated. Para 7.2.1
• Interventions often depend on caseworkers' competence and professional judgements. Government helps best by supporting training of caseworkers, minimising the prescriptive rules which constrain their judgements, giving them time to make the best decisions, supporting their decisions, and acknowledging that in this difficult area, many decisions will have adverse consequences. Para 7.2.1
• Resources are always limited. Focus resources where success is most probable. Para 7.2.2
• Prevention is more sustainable than cure. Address basic causes of poverty and deprivation. Para 7.2.2
• Create and support resources for at risk families. Para 7.2.2
• Community "village" support is non-professional. Accept risks of non-professional support. Para 7.2.2
• Build community resources around schools to improve accessibility. Para 7.2.2

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[1] Source data: www.childrensactionplan.govt.nz

• Fear inhibits wise action. Focus on "risk to children", not "risk to institutions", and on creating a Just (highly blame-free) Culture which will reduce barriers to community taking responsibility. Para 7.2.2

• Take an "All-of-Government" approach based on fundamental causes, which can improve outcomes. Para 7.2.3

• A list of suggested goals is provided, focussed on **underlying causes**. Para 7.2.3

• Since the deep issue is leadership in culture change, we believe that political and official attitude and behaviour is more important than legislation. Para 7.2.4

• A right to share information established by law would support attitude change. Para 7.2.4

• Decisions on the kind and quantity of support services should be based on demand and expectations of cost effectiveness at achieving the outcome of the affected children thriving. Funding can be released by improving the public service ability to create, and to deploy policy more effectively. Para 7.2.6

• Fund early intervention and other child centred action, by saving in public service overheads, by eliminating public service programmes that do not return a high public benefit value, and by overhaul of the tax and benefit system. Para 7.2.6

• Prioritisation of support should focus on those who can be helped most effectively, and is usually a professional judgement made in the absence of sufficient information. These judgements will change as better information is created. Para 7.2.6

• Monitoring and information sharing should be based on the judgement of the caseworkers "need to know." If access to information helps caseworkers make better decisions, then it should be available to them. They should be expected to use this information responsibly. A database of at risk families would require a clear distinction between access to information, and the ability to intrude on case workers decisions. However, tracking families that re-locate is important to maintain support. We do not support the concept of integrated databases   Para 7.2.7

• Policy creation to achieve "Child-centred" practice should be heavily influenced by "coal-face" requirements, and a culture of open communication. Para 7.2.8

• Minimum qualification standards for "workers with children" are ineffective. Some screening, and good training and supervision is probably the best option for paid career professionals. True professionalisation is a major long term strategic goal. Para 7.2.8

• The workforce for children includes parents, caregivers, and voluntary and paid child workers. Para 7.2.8

• Early identification, and continuity of case worker – client relationship are important to successful intervention. Para 7.2.8

• Good practical training, including relationship skills, and ongoing supervision and development is important to a successful child support organisation. Para 7.2.8

2. Submitters

This submission is presented on behalf of Analytica[2]. Analytica is a pro bono Auckland Thinktank, whose recent work in the area of child poverty has been an estimate of the national

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[2] For details see www.analytica.org.nz. This submission is endorsed by J Pender, G Strong, E Henderson, B Wyness, S K Liow, M O Dealy, J H Pearce.

cost of New Zealand's current levels of child poverty. As a result of that investigation, Analytica has developed views about the possible policy options which would reduce child poverty, and the consequent risks and damage to vulnerable children, and New Zealand society. Analytica claims no special knowledge in this field, and puts forward these views based on their personal experiences, and their recent research into the costs of child poverty.

3. Introduction

The Government Vision that "**every child thrives, belongs, and achieves"** is supported in this submission. These are commendable objectives.

The Green Paper's proposed route to achieve this is through sharing responsibility, showing leadership, making policy child-centred, and improving child centred practices.

The gap – the potential to do better- is indicated by the statistics highlighted in the Green Paper Introduction:

1. 30,000 truants each day.

   a) Truancy 8% to 12% in 13-14 yr olds.

   b) 7% female, 3% male students attempted suicide

   c) 7,300 unqualified school leavers (of 60,000 = 12%)

   What does that tell us about schools, and about our cultural attitudes to education?

2. 13,000 avoidable hospital admissions.

   What does that tell us about access to health care?

3. 21,000 cases of reported child abuse (about 2% of children per year), 4,000 annual prosecutions, and 47,000 children in families where violence occurred. (Out of 1m under 18 year olds.)

4. 10% of children under 15 have some disability – health, psychological, physical or learning.

5. 20% of parents experience mental health issues. 3.5% have alcohol issues.

6. 34% of 12-17 yr olds report binge drinking. 10% to 15% heavy cannabis use.

7. 6,000 children have significant behavioural problems by school age (6,000 of 200,000=3%)

8. 8,000 10-14 yr olds engage in criminal activity (Police apprehensions- probably understated) =3%

9. At any one time 15 per cent of children (or 163,000 children aged under 18 years) are particularly vulnerable. However, most children are vulnerable at some point in their lives.

To Thrive, To Belong, To Achieve

The Green Paper asks "Who has a role"; and answers, families, local govt, business, NGOs, and LAST the Government. (Green Paper Introduction)

4. Issues and Symptoms

The Green Paper Introduction:-

1. Sets out Government concerns
2. Explains the Government vision of every child thriving
3. Sets out some symptoms of the gap between the reality and the vision
4. Presents a Treaty-based concept of <u>partnership, protection and participation</u>
5. Summarises the reasons a good childhood matters to the child and the nation
6. Identifies two periods of greater risk- early childhood and adolescence (but ignores the important period from conception to birth), and two factors; of poverty and disability or ill-health.
7. Recognises that most children experience a sense of vulnerability at some time. That what distinguishes those who are damaged is lack of timely appropriate support.
8. Identifies that protecting children against harm requires that they be healthy, feel loved, and learn self sufficiency and resilience through good life experiences.
9. Sets out roles for parents, families, whanau, local government, business, philanthropy, NGO's, and finally central government in helping children thrive.
10. Summarises the Government's priorities – improved care and protection; access to ECE, and improved health services.
11. Identifies 4 areas for improvement – sharing responsibility; showing leadership; making child centred policy changes; and making more child centred practices.

5. The Government's proposed actions

The Government proposes to do more in four areas:
• Share responsibility – the Government alone cannot improve outcomes for vulnerable children; parents are crucial, as are family and whanau, and communities
• Show leadership – Ministers making a long-term commitment to improving outcomes for vulnerable children, and their families and whanau, and working with iwi and Maori leaders
• Make child-centred policy changes – making the targeting and funding trade-offs needed to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, and their families and whanau
• Make child-centred practice changes – excellent and committed professionals work tirelessly to serve vulnerable children, and their families and whanau, but there is room for improvement in how services are aligned and delivered.

6. Submitter's Perspectives.

The Green Paper sets out a broad review, and general lines of proposed action to improve vulnerable children's life outcomes.

Our perception of this broad issue is based on our investigation of the national costs of child poverty, and the insights gained from that research. Those national and personal costs are the consequences of damage to vulnerable children. We have arrived at our submission after considering this issue from multiple perspectives, and will comment on some of these different perceptions.

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We submit that the issues of child vulnerability can be usefully viewed from multiple perspectives.

6.1. A Systems view
Fundamentally we approach this issue as a system problem. We can ask what are the core problems? Why do children not thrive, belong, and achieve? What factors and issues work together to create these undesirable outcomes.

From a systems perspective, these influential core issues are grouped around parents inability to provide their child with a loving, experience-rich early childhood, because of:
1. Personal mental health issues / emotional control issues / substance abuse issues.
2. Lack of experience / knowledge of adequate parenting skills
3. Exhaustion and stress.
4. Poverty.
5. Lack of relief / support / advice / empathy and access to these resources.

6.2. A Life-History view
These issues can be viewed from another (oversimplified) perspective as reflecting the life-experience of many parents of vulnerable children. They may have inadequate personal experience of loving parenting themselves. They may have poor educational levels. They may have poor work experience. They may face social disrespect from others (including public officials). They may have low self esteem. They may have low income. They may have poor quality, and often costly housing. They may have poor general health. They may see no prospect of improving their own, and their children's situation.

6.3. A society view
Expressed differently again, from the viewpoint of society at large these issues are:-

• Inadequate parenting skills and competence.
• Inadequate family income
• High housing costs
• Households under stress
• Lack of job opportunities
• Lack of affordable high quality ECE access for disadvantaged children
• Lack of access to 24/7 health care[3], partly for reasons of affordability.
• Lack of community involvement (villages)
• Lack of advice (not direction) (e.g. Plunket, Barnados, Grandmothers)
• Low self esteem
• Abuse of Alcohol, drugs and gambling.

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[3] Notwithstanding the Healthline 0800 service, which provides telephone access to Nurses for advice some children suffer serious consequences of delayed access to health services.

• Lack of ambition and resilience. (Belief in ability)
• The relative attractiveness of gangs compared to more positive social institutions for some young people.

We note that this formulation is largely materially oriented. Yet the roots of vulnerability are in relationships at least as much as in material resources.

6.4. A Cultural norms view

There is another perspective, which is to see the issue of child vulnerability as most accessible if viewed as an issue of cultural norms. Many children are NOT harmed by poor circumstances. The resilience of many families in adverse circumstances – low income, poor housing, lack of support- shows that children need not be vulnerable if the family culture- world view, or beliefs in action- is such that nurturing children is a <u>cultural</u> priority. (We use "culture" here in a broad sense, identifying the local community norms of ethnic groups, faith groups, geographical groups, or social class groups.)

We suggest that this perspective is the most powerful long term approach to eliminating child harm. A changed cultural view will marshal resources to overcome most of the material issues raised above. Without a national culture shift, we will continue to tolerate unacceptable levels of child poverty and vulnerability and harm.
The Government Vision could become the initiation of a process of shifting the national consensus, and so enabling a shift in the accepted cultural views of toleration of child poverty.

6.5 Who is vulnerable?

An important aspect of this issue is the perspective of who society perceives as vulnerable. At one end of a spectrum are those children (about 10%) who suffer personal physical and mental disabilities or display behavioural problems. From a broader perspective, any child born into, or growing up in a family where there are combinations of difficult circumstances can be exposed to some level of risk of not thriving. The Green Paper variously suggests that at any one time 15% of children are vulnerable; that 34% of 12-17 year olds report binge drinking; and that most children are vulnerable at some point in their lives. The implication is that the narrow view – that vulnerability is about personal physical and mental disability – might focus on only half or less of those at serious risk.
Given the Government Vision, that "**every** child thrives, belongs, and achieves" the broader perspective is necessary to achieve this outcome.

The issue of who is vulnerable interacts with the issue of where to focus effort. Priority can be given to preventing this generation of children being damaged by a focus on the "foetus to five" period; or we can focus on treating emerging problems in these children. Successfully responding to emerging problems can also be a successful intervention in preventing damage in the next generation. However, acting to prevent damage to this generation may produce faster results.

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The Green Paper approaches the issues of child vulnerability through consideration of the immediate and difficult policy questions of:-

How to support parents?

How to balance services.

When to intervene in a child's family?

Another, and we submit more effective, level of questions is to choose the kind of strategic changes required in society to eliminate child harm, and to develop processes to enable society to evolve in that direction. The Green Paper ignores this approach in favour of a more tactical perspective.

(We note in passing that the scope of the Green Paper, like the scope of the Welfare Working Group terms of reference, appears to us, from our experience of strategic planning, to define the areas of possible action too narrowly, and so precludes the most effective policy options.)

7. Submission

7.1. Introduction

The Green paper asks by implication

"Why do children not thrive, belong, and achieve?"

The proposed framework for responses emphasises a range of tactical questions of detail, and places less focus on the fundamental reasons for this failure.

A systems perspective is to ask what symptoms do we observe, and what fundamental aspects of the system cause these symptoms. It is then possible to treat the root causes of the problems, rather than continue to focus on cosmetic treatment of symptoms.

This need to focus on long term prevention is consistent with the 2008 Ministerial briefing from the Social Sector Forum Ministries- MSD, Health, Education, Justice.

At one level the core issues influencing why children don't thrive, belong, and achieve are well known:-

1. Lack of achievement in early life & schools- educational, social, character forming.
2. Lack of parents parenting skills & relationship skills.
3. Lack of support for parents and family during times of stress.
4. Excess family stress from lack of income, lack of support, and high housing costs.

Why is NZ stuck with these causes? We submit that the contributing causes include:-

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1. Lack of sustainable job creation for all those who want to work.[4]
2. Low wages for many unskilled workers, compared to a largely advertising-created set of unaffordable life-style expectations. This creates a deeply ingrained sense of unfairness, missing out, disadvantage, and not being respected, for the most disadvantaged.
3. Large and growing income and wealth inequalities.
4. Large inequalities in educational system results in both academic achievement and social skills education. (For example academic results ranging from 10% to 90% probability of obtaining University Entrance depending on the school attended.)
5. Combinations of social stress and family stress which overwhelms about 20% of parents.

What could be done?   Analytica, an Auckland think tank, has explored this issue in the context of estimating the costs to New Zealand of the present high level of child poverty, and all its adverse individual and social consequences.

The Figure 1 below shows an example of a coherent policy set of possible interventions developed from this analysis.

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[4] See Dept of Labour Jobs Online & Skilled Vacancies Index. Wall & Fale Job Vacancy Monitoring in NZ Dept of Labour, 2011 suggests that at least a minimum Unemployment rate of around 3.5% to 4% (HLFS measure) occurs with vacancy rates as reported by Jobs Online of about 7%.

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Figure 1 Possible policy Interventions

This table summarises some areas where policy change could reduce poverty, and increase opportunity for "at-risk" families and children.

The mind-map diagram "Policy Options to Enable All to Thrive" branches into:

- **Job Creation**
  - Small Business creation incentives
  - Export business creation incentives
    - Exchange rate managed for productive economy
    - Tax non-Tradeable FX transactions
  - Part-time employment incentives
  - Increased NZ savings
    - Discouraging Rental housing investment
    - Encouraging business / job creation investment
  - Improve school- work transitions
    - Business-school communication
    - Apprenticeship systems expanded
- **Support for choice to work**
  - Improved public transport systems
  - Part-time work incentives
- **Teaching Parenting Skills**
  - Communication skills
    - Creating Rapport
    - 2 way Communicaiton with children
  - Child Development
- **Incapable/Stressed Parent Support**
  - Identification of families in need
    - Prioritisation of support services (triage)
    - Access to Support professionals required.
  - Affordable & accessible 24/7 child healthcare
  - Corps of Grandmothers
- **Childcare for Working parents**
  - Corps of Grandmothers
  - ECE/Playcentre/Kohanga Reo
- **Government Support Services**
  - Improved Competence based Training
    - Professional Credentialing Systems
  - Improved information sharing culture & Policies
- **Community Organisations delivering family support**
  - Plunket / Whanau Ora to identify families in need
    - Networks/ "Villages" for support
    - Specialist professional support organisations
  - School based community development support
- **Housing Land Cost reduction**
  - Reduced Development Levies
  - Spread development Levies via rates
  - Intergenerational infrastructure loans
- **Housing cost reduction**
  - Capital Gains Tax
  - Bank Lending regulation
    - Constrain housing lending
    - Require small business lending for growth
    - Limit small business owners personal guarantee requirements.
  - Social housing construction
- **Support Self-respect**
  - Minimum Income / Negative Income tax
    - Adult rate
    - Child rate (i.e. Child Support)
  - Networks /"Villages" for self support
  - Reduce Inequality

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Potential policy changes suggested above are aimed at creating and sustaining jobs, making the choice to work more practical for solo parents, expanding access to parent support, reducing inequality, and building supporting communities around parents. (Creating mutual support parent groups & grand-mothers / mentors, needs them to have both time, and money, to build and sustain those groups.) High housing costs also need addressing.

Beyond this, more fundamental causes are issues of a developing sense of individual influence and control of one's life, and of opportunity in society. The great majority of the disadvantaged feel disempowered and disrespected.[5] The consequent lack of goals and motivation to achieve those goals is a major factor in their perceived "failure" as illustrated by the "Issues and Symptoms" above.

So we conclude that addressing children's vulnerability can focus on the "Symptoms" level, or the fundamental causes level.

This submission conforms to the structure of the Green Paper, and to some extent addresses that "Symptoms" framework. It also endeavours a more comprehensive set of submissions aimed at more fundamental causes. A second submission offers a view on a broader and potentially more effective approach.[6]

We submit that balanced action at both levels is required, and that the long term nature of the effort required to eliminate children's vulnerability requires more emphasis on deep long-term social causes.

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[5] 62%` of citizens support the view that "Welfare benefits make people lazy and dependent". NZ Election Study 2005-2008, and Social Citizenship in New Zealand 2010, reported in Public Attitudes to Benefits, Humpage, CPAG Welfare Forum 2010. Paul Smyth Social Services "Second class services for second class citizens", CPAG Welfare Forum 2010. "High rates of crime are due to a combination of factors, that include socio-economic factors, family difficulties, and impaired cultural identity. All these factors are compatible with an explanation of colonialisation as a fundamental factor." RIchie Poulson quoting Fergusson in Drives of Crime – Ministerial Briefing and see NZ Attitudes to Social Citizenship in the context of NeoLiberalism Dr Louise Humpage. Univ of Auckland.
Benefit fraud is under 0.1%, a great deal less than one would believe from media publicity, and partly by social welfare staff.

[6] Individual Submission on Green Paper from J H Pearce.

Submission within the Government Framework

7.2.Share responsibility- Parents and communities.

7.2.1. Government

• **What services and programmes could government agencies consider in a review of support for parents and caregivers?**

Submission

All services and programmes relevant to children need review, to identify what works and what should be replaced. The two major criteria of successful services are:

1. *what will create long term measurable improvements cost-effectively; and*
2. *what is acceptable to children and parents.*

A client-focussed set of client defined outcomes, and measures, rather than an agency focused perspective will improve services.

Choosing programmes is based on professional judgement about what is expected to work effectively. Monitoring over long enough time-frames to detect effectiveness then confirms, or refutes expectation. Ineffective programmes need replacing by better ideas.

We make the distinction that "Outcomes" should be developed with significant and real input from the people whose lives are most affected- parents and caregivers and children; while the methods to achieve those outcomes – the programmes- rely much more heavily on the expert knowledge and judgement of professionals.

Client response to support agencies, both Government and NGOs is significantly influenced by the relationship between the provider and the client. We submit that measures should be taken to benchmark agencies in the social service space with regard to the frequency of adverse events; what organisational learning is extracted from review of these events, and how successfully this learning is displayed in action. Clients can have an important role in defining, assessing and improving service delivery performance.

As part of supporting parents and caregivers, a review of barriers seen by the disadvantaged is important, to recognise their perspective on what holds them back.

Since many other Government programmes are focussed on providing services to the more advantaged segments of society, these programmes should also be included in a review process, to enable broad prioritisation of what programmes benefit society most. Much good work is done in seeking to make many government-wide programmes more cost effective. However there is more scope for systematic review of the long term national benefit of some central and local government activities, and elimination of activities with lower benefit : cost profiles. For example, the high costs of establishing, and of on-going local government inspection to apply building standards has not proved an effective system for building quality control. In another example, there is a public perception that the remuneration of public

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service CEOs –salaries and pensions- are more generous than equivalent private sector roles; and that this "private sector benchmark" is already paid excessively relative to most workers. This view is consistent with another perception that many of these senior public service positions could be just as effectively filled at much lower remuneration levels. (Public discussion of University Vice-Chancellors roles illustrates the point)

Adoption of much less complex systems, and reduction in the defensive management culture in the public service could reduce administrative costs.

Any review should also consider the management and media constraints on professionals' judgement in serving their clients in the clients' best interests.
Management culture, management and professional training, and service quality monitoring should all be considered in any programme reviews. Peer review as a quality improvement, and professional learning tool should have high priority.

Summary

Broad review of all Government agencies is required, not only for a child centred approach, but also to identify where funding to more privileged sections of society could be re-allocated.

• Have government agencies got the balance right in supporting parents, caregivers, family and whānau, to meet their responsibilities, while also protecting the needs of vulnerable children?

Submission

This is mainly an operational issue, not a policy issue. In particular cases, decisions must balance the risk of damage of remaining in the family (even if better supported) against the risk of damage from splitting up natural family networks.

At the policy level, the question of support or protection is more about the style and culture of government officials in dealing with parents, caregivers, and family / whanau . Caseworkers make the best professional judgments they can. Training them well; credentialing them to their professions based on professional assessment of competence, and then trusting their decisions; and accepting that a significant number of decisions will create objections, and speaking realistically about what is achievable, will all help caseworkers make good decisions.

There is a significant public education task to gain acceptance of the reality that the best-intentioned decisions to support or intervene to protect will often be unsuccessful. Shifting to more and more intervention, to avoid bad publicity may not be the most child-centred policy.

• When should government agencies step in and intervene with families and whānau

Submission

The decision to intervene is a difficult, and situation specific decision. It is essentially a judgment which can only be made by a well informed caseworker. The best results will occur when the caseworker is well trained; has time to get the facts and understand the options; and operates in a policy climate that is not over constrained by detailed rules. The caseworker must also be supported by a management which will support and explain when decisions have adverse consequences and publicity; and which communicates to society that in this difficult domain, many decisions have adverse side effects.

*Intervention is appropriate when **the caseworker** – who knows most about the wholesituation- judges that the likely outcome for the child will be significantly worse than providing the best support available in that situation, and when the child accepts the proposed intervention. These are always difficult and uncertain decisions, and providing well trained case workers, with time to gather information and make sound decisions is the best attainable outcome.*

All parenting is imperfect. It is important to set criteria for intervention which are not unrealistically perfectionist, and which do take account of different cultural norms. What is more positive is resourcing support services – medical, counselling, mentoring, which can work with parents to help them improve their parenting behaviour, and finding ways to make using those supports attractive to the parents who most need their help.

Policies which over-emphasise avoiding harm, but consequently disrupt too many families where the risks are low, seem to arise from a lack of willingness to trust and support fieldworkers decisions, and to blame them for errors. More trust in, and support for professional judgement is required. Caseworkers' judgements require adequate time to build relationships with families to enable them to make well informed decisions.

Summary

Interventions depend on caseworkers professional judgements. Government helps best by supporting training and credentialing of caseworkers, minimising the prescriptive rules, giving them time to make the best decisions, supporting their decisions, and acknowledging that in this difficult area, many decisions will have adverse consequences.

7.2.2. Communities

• How can Government encourage communities to take more responsibility for the wellbeing of their children?

Submission

Communities will tend to take more responsibility when officials display more trust, and seek less detailed control over community groups' work. Different communities work in different ways, and have different standards. Officials tend to favour standardised solutions, and are unduly fearful of community groups' mistakes. However, we believe that the personal relationships that can be forged by community support organisations with those needing help enable more effective intervention. We therefore support the trend to "high trust" contracts.

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Communities can be encouraged by Government addressing major causes of children's vulnerability, rather than focussing on secondary issues. Major <u>causative</u> issues including job creation, alcohol availability and abuse, hard drugs, gambling, access to child health and ECE, appear to be given less attention by Government than <u>consequences</u> like welfare costs, crime, and visible minority issues like welfare dependency. Politicians and public servants must lead by example, and be seen to address the big issues rather than the easy issues. Most unemployed want to work. Most mothers of vulnerable children want the best for their child. The current focus is on the few who don't, rather than on supporting the many who do. Government could work with voluntary agencies to develop and expand support for families without a family / whanau support network. Agencies like Plunket, teachers, (and even Housing NZ's tenancy officers) are often a first point of contact who can identify places where support would prevent later problems. There is potential for a "Corps of Grandmothers", experienced mothers with no local grandchildren, to be linked up with unsupported mothers. However, cautious bureaucratic fears of some few people being unsuitable, and pre-occupation with qualification over competence, will always stand in the way of this kind of initiative. Professionalisation of adults who care for children may not provide the best outcomes for the most children, and has been described as a kind of "colonialism"- the professional culture knows best. This can be a barrier to community involvement. Policy unwillingness to risk small side effects of major beneficial action is a barrier to experimentation.

Schools, particularly ECE & primary schools, have the potential to be the basis for strong local community building, if they were resourced to provide more extensive personal support and pastoral care for students & families in need (partly supportive mentoring, partly reference to appropriate specialist support where needed). Building mentoring networks for the 10% to 15% of children & their families in need from within their school and local communities, is a feasible kind of intervention. However, the "compartmentalistion" of public service thinking has so far prevented sufficient of this kind of systems approach. More broadly, school outreach to involve <u>all</u> parents (e.g. as described for Granger High School, Yakima Valley Washington State USA in [http://www.learningfirst.org/second-set-parents-advisory-groups-and-student-achievement-granger-high)](http://www.learningfirst.org/second-set-parents-advisory-groups-and-student-achievement-granger-high) would have a dramatic impact in lower decile schools. This requires teachers to call on all parents to talk about their children's progress- a paradigm shift for NZ teachers. Programmes of this kind in NZ schools could be further expanded, and resourced.[7]

Since resources are always limited, the concepts of "triage" applied in the medical field may be appropriate to child welfare. Focussing limited resources on making a difference for the many at risk children whose futures can be changed, is more effective than endeavouring to make changes in the few impossible cases, which can absorb substantial resources.

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[7] Kelston Boys is believed to be a NZ example. " Community involvement in raising student achievement" Kerry Taylor 2008 provides a New Zealand example.

To Thrive, To Belong, To Achieve

Summary

Focus resources where success is most probable. Address causes of poverty and deprivation. Create and support resources for at risk families. Accept risks of non-professional support. Build community resources around schools.

• What barriers need to be removed to allow communities to take responsibility for the wellbeing of their vulnerable children?

Submission

The primary barrier is fear. Public service fear of responsibility for something going wrong and attracting bad publicity. Community fear of the risks of blame for failure. Both these fears are largely fuelled by news media reporting focus on a "blaming culture". Addressing the public media "blame" culture is the core barrier to be addressed, and politicians and public servants have so far lacked the willingness to do this. The fundamental truth that parents of vulnerable children need support, not punishment, is politically unacceptable, and until that is publicly recognised, it cannot be changed. The comparison of attitudes to abusive parents (who make errors largely from incompetence) with the attitude to pilot errors in aviation is relevant. We reduce pilot error by focusing on learning, not blame. We fail to reduce child abuse by remaining blame focussed.
(This is not to argue that some extreme behaviour is not blameworthy, but that the media and so the public are too eager to scapegoat individuals for what are often system failures, which need analysis and improvement. Contrary to the media view it is not always true that an imperfect system means someone is culpable. A Just Culture seeks improvements, not blame.

Summary

Focus on risk to children, not risk to institutions; and a Just (largely blame-free) culture[8], will reduce barriers to community responsibility.

• What can you do in your community to support or initiate community-led actions to support vulnerable children, and their families and whānau?

Submission

The submitters have endeavoured, as a pro bono project, to quantify the national cost of child poverty[9], and to publicise this cost, so that there can be informed debate about the benefits of eliminating child poverty in New Zealand. They note with regret that Government publicly criticised similar international comparison based work carried out by Infometrics, which demonstrated shortcomings in New Zealand's policy mix, and ignored its key, and valid messages. This example illustrates the tension between the pressures of competitive party politics, and child-centred leadership.
We can continue to advocate for a "Systems Thinking" approach to policy formation, a focus on causes as well as remedies, and for courage amongst politicians and public servants to

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[8] Just Culture describes the approach, adopted in aviation, of seeking out and fixing causes, often systematic causes, rather than scapegoating individuals.
[9] http://analytica.org.nz/Publications/

make policy choices in the best interests of the nations children, not their own party, Departmental, or personal interests.

Summary

Focus on prevention, not cure, and on national long term benefits.

7.2.3. Show Leadership

Vulnerable children action plan
• **How can an action plan help improve outcomes for vulnerable children?**

Submission

The recognition of the need to overcome the "silo" nature, and lack of communication between Government agencies is a good beginning, if adopted seriously.

Adoption of common goals / outcomes across various agencies, whilst accepting differences in methods to achieve them, will enable more local influence on how vulnerable families are supported.

Acceptance of the many proposals in the recent "Transitions[10]" report would be another useful step.

In our view, the current Welfare reform agenda is counterproductive, and is focussed on dealing with consequences, not preventing problems arising. In the absence of policy which achieves successful creation of sustainable jobs, it is unlikely to be effective. Its whole reference frame does not meet the "research, evidence and data" based foundation proposed in the introduction to this Green Paper.

Any worthwhile action plan must address job creation, affordable housing, healthcare access, ECE access, community support structures creation, and culture change towards social service clients in government departments. It must also be founded on sound economic Benefit : Cost analysis. Unfortunately, there is so far little sign of serious and comprehensive economic analysis by Government in this area of policy.

The Green Paper suggestion of clear accountabilities for CEO's is a partial step; it omits Ministers taking more serious accountability to develop effective long term polices for Departments to administer.

Summary

An "All-of-Government" approach based on fundamental causes can improve outcomes.

• **What goals could the Government include in a plan …to improve outcomes for vulnerable children?**

Submission

*A coherent set of goals needs to address the **underlying causes** of ongoing child poverty and vulnerability, and should include:*

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[10] "Improving the Transition Reducing Social and Psychological Morbidity during Adolescence" Chief Science Advisor,2011

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1. *Policies to enable the creation of sustainable jobs. A goal of private sector job demand at some multiple of unemployment (as measured by household surveys) would demonstrate success in job creation. Sub goals could include*
    a. *National export sales values for businesses employing 20 or fewer staff.*
    b. *Exchange rate levels, and variability around that target and processes to achieve this.[11]*
    c. *Action to make the choice for solo parents to take part time work economically sensible for the individuals. A goal measure would be the difference in income between working or not working after expenses associated with working and tax.*
    d. *Increased level of national savings, and increased levels of savings invested in New Zealand businesses.*
    e. *Goals of apprenticeships started and completed.*
    f. *Goals of measures of employer satisfaction with first time employees from all levels of the education system.*
2. *Creation of a Corps of Grandmothers to mentor unsupported mothers. Goal of number of mothers without family / whanau / mentor support.*
3. *Goal of universal access to first line medical advice 24/7 for all under 6 year olds*
4. *Goal of identifying at risk / in need families during pregnancy and in the first 3 years of a child's life, and goals of providing access to appropriate support within 2 months of identifying needs.*
5. *Goal of ensuring access to ECE for all children which is affordable to parents. Treating ECE like primary education in terms of entitlement and parent cost.*
6. *Goal of measuring all "social service space" service providers quality of client service, and organisational ability to learn from adverse events and deploy those learnings.*
7. *Goal of creating school community based family support services to identify & support children in need.*
    a. *Goal of ensuring every student has a mentoring relationship with a teacher or other member of staff whilst at school. Measure by survey of pupil's opinions.*
8. *Goal of making housing cost affordable (below 25% of income) for all citizens.*
    a. *Goal of social housing construction*
    b. *Goal of bank lending regulation to avoid house price speculation and bubbles*
    c. *Goal of shifting savings from rental housing to business investment.*
    d. *Goal of reducing new section costs in urban areas by 50%.*

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[11] The Tobin Tax, on spot and short term currency conversions, is a method to achieve this. Stiglitz, former Chief Economist of the World Bank considered such a tax feasible. Swedish experience suggests a big impact on transaction volumes, a desirable outcome, and this is supported by 2/3 of research studies.(Schulmeister 2008) Currently both France & Germany are seeking European "Tobin Tax" -Telegraph 5 Feb 2012.

9. *Goal of creating effective incentives and educational policies to increase school retention, and lift measures of competence and self confidence of school leavers.*
10. *Goal of community building.*
    a. *Goal of supporting community organisations which help parents and children*
    b. *Goal of parents believing that they can find support from school communities.*
11. *Goal of access to information, measured by no professional being unable to obtain any information they consider relevant to their assessing or assisting a child potentially or actually at risk.*
12. *Goal of creating effective professional organisations for several categories of child workers (e.g. Early childhood carers, early childhood educators, primary school teachers, secondary school teachers, counsellors, social workers) which provide:-*
    a. *National standards of professional competence[12]*
    b. *National credentialing bodies*
    c. *And achieve widespread public recognition of these professions*

• **What actions could be included in a plan?**

Submission

1. *Managing the economy to ensure*
    a. *Job creation of sustainable work for those who seek it, and*
    b. *Affordable house prices for citizens through balancing mortgage finance and house supply.*
2. *Using community groups to support parents.*
3. *Creating simple access to first line medical advice for parents 24/7 (possibly via a Community Health Nurse model, based in School or ECE locations.)*
4. *Identifying parents and children in need of professional early support & providing it*
5. *Making child care available & affordable for parents who want to work (partly through schooling hours and services)[13]*
6. *Creating support structures available to parents centred on schools.*
7. *Recognising and rewarding (via the Universal Minimum Income) the work of child-raising.*
8. *Making ECE universally available.*
9. *Creating a more cohesive society, through reducing inequality.*

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[12] The importance of the teacher/student relationship for Maori and Pasifika students 2002 Kay Hawk, Esther Tumama Cowley, Jan Hill and Sue Sutherland describes the kind of personal attributes which might be set for professional master teachers.
[13] A cost : benefit analysis of the long term economics of providing before and after school child-care for working parents – free to solo parents- might be illuminating.

10. *Changing the presumptions about lack of freedom to share information amongst some child care professionals.*
11. *Facilitating the creation of effective child care professions capable of establishing effective competence standards.*

Summary

Addressing fundamental causative factors through sustainable policy deployment.

• What could be the priorities for vulnerable children for the early years, for primary school-aged children and adolescents?

Submission

Long term solutions require priority before birth, and during the first 5 years of children's lives. The effect of early interventions is much greater in prevention than later efforts at amelioration. Hard decisions of a "triage" kind are probably necessary for the best long term benefits.[14]

The immediate aims of actions should be to alter the family environments of at risk children, through working with their parents, to give those children at least the minimum necessary abilities to cope with and benefit from formal education when they reach age 5-6. These include a sense of belonging and being loved in their family; and a sufficiently varied set of experiences in a sufficiently supportive environment, that they have sufficient self confidence, and language skills to adapt to schooling. Success with pre-school & primary school aged children will reduce the later year's problems.

The Science Advisors "Transitions" report canvassed the issues of adolescence comprehensively.

7.2.4. Legislation

Submission

The focus on legislation reflects a bureaucratic perspective on the issues. Changing life outcomes for vulnerable children is primarily about family relationships, and the social structures and norms that need to evolve to minimise the number of children whose childhood experiences are harmful.

Whilst media attack every operational error of caseworkers, and so bureaucracies adopt defensive policies-in-action, children will not be the priority in each decision. Neither can central policy & legislation encompass the different value sets of New Zealand's different communities.

What is required is an ongoing public discussion of the problems, focussed on solutions, not blame.

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[14] Priority should focus on those whose situation is changeable. The resilient need less support. Those in impossible situations probably need placement.

The example of Privacy legislation being a restriction on sharing is often quoted. The Privacy Commissioner has expressed the view[15] that current legislation is adequate, but its scope is not being used because of bureaucratic culture, not legislative constraint. New legislation will not change this culture issue.

The proposed "Privacy (Information Sharing) Bill" appears to us to be an example of making complex, bureaucratic system changes, when a totally different perspective is required. It is based on creating complex agreements, of closely defined nature, to permit commonsense sharing of knowledge and opinions. We submit that a change of assumption is required. The better premise is that professionals involved with families and children have a right and even perhaps a responsibility to share information with other professionals, whenever it will, in their opinion, be beneficial for the child to do so. Any less a premise fails the test of a "child centred policy".[16]

• What do you see as the value of using legislation to underpin a Vulnerable Children's Action Plan?
• What other actions or principles would you like to see included in legislation?
• Who could legislation require to report on national progress against an Action Plan?
• What things could be included in such a report?

Submission
New Zealand already subscribes to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Effective action is limited not by Legislative issues, but by political and official attitudes and behaviour.

A law change to establish a right to share information about children is desirable.

Summary
Since the issue is leadership in culture change, we believe that political and official attitudes and behaviour is more important than legislation. The Privacy Act mis-use quoted above is illustrative. A right to share information established by law would support attitude change.

7.2.5. Working with Maori

• How can the Government work in partnership with iwi, Māori organisations and their leaders to deliver services for vulnerable tamariki and their whānau?
• What services or programmes are working well to achieve tamariki ora?
• What could be improved to ensure that services generate tamariki ora?
• How can we get services to hard-to-reach Māori whānau?

Submission
We make no substantive submission on this area. We note the endeavours to evaluate the effectiveness of Whanau Ora after only 2 years implementation. From our limited knowledge,

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[15] NZ Listener 11 Feb 2012, pg 28

[16] Anecdotal evidence suggests that much informal information sharing already exists in some areas. This should be encouraged.

we have serious doubts that the impact of such a long term programme could be realistically evaluated in less than 5 years.

We do submit that similar policies are relevant to other minority groups. Pacific Island communities, refugee groups, and other minority immigrants face similar problems, and should be equally considered.

7.2.6. Make Child Centred Policy

• Do you think the Government should provide more targeted services for vulnerable children?

If yes, from where should funding be taken to do so?

Submission

Identification of children in need should be a priority for service providers. Decision making about what support services are appropriate is an issue for the parents, child, and caseworker. The kind and quantity of support services must be balanced around demand, and expected effectiveness. Priority should go to those services thought to be more cost effective. Parent-child communication is the foundation of nearly all pre-school learning, especially communication and social skills, a relevant example is the Hanen Program[17], which teaches parents two way communication skills with children, starting with pre-verbal interactions at birth.

Delays in getting support for children presently diagnosed as "in need" suggests services are sometimes inadequate. This may require more funds for existing services; or it may suggest reorganisation of how these services are provided. A significant improvement may come from providing the services through different structures. (for example, access to a practice nurse could well meet 80% or more of the need for children's "first line" medical contact, with referral to a GP or hospital, or treatment by the nurse or parent as required.)

Funding

Since the public service grew by 50% in the decade 2000-2010 (without any noticeable increase in the quality of service by Government to citizens), it seems likely that major savings could be made by reducing bureaucracy and making clear decisions about what Government could do less of. Reducing prison and Court costs by reducing child poverty (with all its consequences) seems an obvious starting point for a long term solution. Shorter term, giving priority to children involves both reducing government costs in unproductive activity; and increasing government revenue.

Reviewing and ranking all government programmes by their impact on national wellbeing would provide a framework for identifying the less valuable activity. In essence this is about making policy formulation a more efficient and effective process. For example we note that the "About Time" report of May 2001, with Treasury participation, concluded that early childhood intervention could return 25:1 benefit : cost ratio. Few existing programmes achieve this level of return.[18]

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[17] Innovative Early Language development http://www.hanen.org/Home.aspx

[18] Judge Graeme McCormick, quoted in Kings Courier 2011.

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Large organisations, especially those facing no competitive pressures to serve their clients effectively, tend strongly to high cost organisational complexity. They have no client pressure towards efficiency. This is true of both public and private sector organisations. Government organisations are particularly exposed to these tendencies. Creating and maintaining a cost effective service culture in such organisation is a challenge, in the face of individual interest in a large and expanding organisation for career reasons. The largest potential for cost saving is probably in finding ways to shift public service cultures towards the sharper client outcome, and cost control focus of the most successful medium sized businesses.
The tension in policy formulation between good analysis and widespread consultation and consensus-seeking is always difficult, and requires constant review to maintain a cost-effective process.

If more funding is required, it could be provided via an effective capital gains tax or an approach similar to the Comprehensive Capital Tax proposals of "The Big Kahuna"[19] with its other collateral benefits of shifting investment into job creations, and reducing housing costs.

Summary

Decisions on the kind and quantity of support services should be based on demand and expectations of cost effectiveness at achieving the outcome of the affected children thriving. Funding can be released by improving the public service ability to create, and to deploy policy more effectively.

• Should the Government reprioritise spending to provide more early intervention; that is, more services for younger children and/or services for children that address problems as they are beginning to surface?
• If so, from where should funding be taken?

Submission

Early intervention is the most cost effective, which strongly suggests it should be given priority.

Funding can be taken from other public spending by reducing public service size, and eliminating low value public service activity. Arguably, for example, spending on eliminating child poverty creates more value for NZ than spending on reducing global warming. Numerous studies demonstrate that effective preventive child health interventions are very cost effective.[20]

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[19] The Big Kahuna, Tax and Welfare" Gareth Morgan and Susan Guthrie 2011. pg 175 (We note that the submitters, as mature professionals, would all probably pay higher taxes under this proposal for the rest of their lives.)

[20] The Marmot Review *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: A Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England Post-2010* published 11 February 2010. Burden and Cost of Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease in New Zealand: Focus on School age children. Milne, Lennon, Stewart, Hoorn, Scuffham 2010.

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Reducing Government Department's Head Offices, by reducing the centralised policy control functions, and trusting and delegating operational staff to use their professional competence in the public interest might create further savings. (For example, many schools might function much better with a greatly reduced Department of Education. Imposing a single nation-wide policy solution for all schools is sometimes not the best way to advance educational outcomes. The combination of advice and guidance on outcomes from ERO, with much more freedom of method left to Principals and Boards might also be more administratively cost effective.   "Tomorrow's Schools" envisaged a Ministry of Education of 300. The current Ministry is many times larger – 2,600 by 2008.)

*The quoted question "**If so, from where should funding be taken?"** possibly implies a trade-off within child support programmes. If so we submit that a wider focus on trade-offs is desirable.*
If more funding is required, it can be provided via an effective capital gains tax (or its equivalent as proposed in The Big Kahuna.) What is required is a significant overhaul of the present tax and benefit regime.

Summary
Fund early intervention by saving public service overheads, and overhaul of the tax and benefit system.

• What priority should the Government give to the families and whānau of those caring for vulnerable children when allocating services that impact on the children they are caring for?
• What services do you think should be included in this policy?
• When should adults who care for vulnerable children be prioritised for services over others?

Submission
Prioritisation in the use of limited public resources should be weighted towards those outcomes which are most valuable to society and can be most effectively achieved. Changing outcomes for at risk children has high social value. This suggests that where help for those supporting vulnerable children can be effective, it should be given priority. What ever resources can achieve the outcome are within the scope of consideration for priority.
Generally, sensible prioritisation and resource allocation is going to be based on informed judgements about what services, and to whom, will change the outcomes for the most at risk children.
This is essentially a "triage" decision of welfare and economic outcomes. If an intervention can reduce the risk of health or educational adverse effects, that leave the individual and the country worse off, then prompt intervention is justified.

Summary
Prioritisation of support should focus on those who can be helped most effectively, and is usually a professional judgement made in the absence of sufficient information. These

judgements will change as better information is created. Institutional support for the individuals faced with these decisions is important.

7.2.7. Child monitoring practices

• **How much monitoring of vulnerable children should the Government allow?**
• **Who should monitor vulnerable children and under what circumstances?**
• **How can the possible negative consequences of increased monitoring be minimised?**
• **What other mechanisms could be used to keep track of vulnerable children and their families and whānau?**
• **What information should professionals be able, or required, to share about vulnerable children?**
• **Under what circumstances should they share information?**
• **Who should be able to share information, and with whom?**
• **What else can the Government do to make sure professionals and services have all the information they need to make the best decisions about services for vulnerable children and their families and whānau?**

Submission

No monitoring process is foolproof. Excess monitoring sends strong signals of "distrust" to the parents, and is disempowering. Lack of monitoring risks harm to the child. If parents have good 24/7 health access to a Practice Nurse; and regular contact with Plunket or Iwi service providers (and later ECE centres and schools which give priority to building teacher-parent contacts), then most of those families where there are vulnerable children will be known. Whatever support services are working with parents of vulnerable children should be able to develop adequate relationships to detect if and when further intervention is required. Monitoring can be a by-product of normal community interactions by Plunket Nurses, Doctors, Nurses, Teachers, and any adults in touch with the child.

Monitoring by individuals from support agencies with ongoing and supportive relationships to the parents will almost always be more acceptable, and more likely to obtain a true and complete picture than by Government agencies with "authority" and a primary surveillance role and attitudes.

Professionals should be free to share whatever information they consider relevant, and to provide others with an interest in the child's welfare with what ever information <u>they consider</u> relevant. Attempting to lay down "hard and fast" rules is counterproductive, but a decision to withhold information from a relevant parent, teacher, support worker or professional ought to have a fairly high threshold of justification. (Roughly speaking a "Right to Know" approach) Society should place trust in professional judgment, since most workers in this field are genuinely concerned about the children they deal with. Excess bureaucratic control denigrates fieldworkers' professionalism, and hinders the best quality decision making. (This is believed to have occurred widely as a result of the misuse of the Official information Act.) Current proposed changes in the Privacy (Information sharing) Bill do not address this issue, and are probably counter-productive.

Keeping track of children at risk whose families re-locate, and sharing information with the relevant professionals in their new location should be facilitated.

Monitoring by medical or social work professionals may require databases for their specific purposes. However, information sharing is likely to be more about sharing information relevant to risk assessment and action decisions, and be more weighted towards professional opinion and judgement.

We recognise that establishing an integrated database of at risk children and families faces the difficulty that government agencies may seek to over-manage (second guess) caseworkers decisions, and this can be a disincentive to sharing too much detail. A strong delegation culture would be necessary to make any formal database system of sharing effective.

Balancing the risk of too little intervention – a risk to a single child- with the risk to many children of intervening too often,- perhaps removing them from their families and creating new and different risks- will always present difficulties in balancing child centred and organisational centred risks. We do not support the concept of integrated databases for information about at risk children.

Summary

Monitoring and information sharing should be based on the judgement of the caseworkers' need to know. If access to information helps caseworkers make better decisions, then it should be available to them. They should be expected to use this information responsibly. A database of at risk families would require a clear distinction between access to information, and the ability to intrude on case workers decisions. However, tracking families that re-locate is important to maintain support. We do not support the concept of integrated databases

7.2.8.   Child Centred practice changes

• **What can be done to improve or promote collaboration between professionals and services?**

Submission

The first steps are to consult with those professionals and services to have them identify the barriers they face; and act to remove those barriers. Policy makers objections should be valued more lightly than service providers identified barriers.

The culture of withholding information needs to be overcome.

Fear of errors, and the public media driven blame culture needs to be addressed.

Summary

Policy creation to achieve "Child-centred" practice should be based on "coal-face" requirements, and a culture of open communication.

• **What principles, competencies or quality standards should be included in the minimum standards for a workforce for children?**

Submission

The difficulty of specifying minimum standards is that "competence" is not easily measured or defined. Working with children is essentially a "craft skill". Experience and interpersonal skill is at least as important as theoretical knowledge. Current policy uses formal

qualification as a surrogate measure of competence for professionals. Some research[21] suggests that it is the quality of relationship between children and the adults they interact with that influences outcomes more than qualification; or even competence. Formal qualification as a minimum excludes many who would be effective child support workers, and cannot reliably exclude the ineffective.

Finally, since parents are the primary "workers with children" the concept of a minimum (formal) standard for a "workforce for children" appears unrealistic- there being no minimum standard practical for parenthood.

This suggests that the minimum standard is a loving (or at least caring) relationship with the child/children concerned, and basic skills in building relationships, as judged by other professionals. Supervision, and performance review in support organisations may be the most effective method of monitoring competence, and rejecting the incompetent.

Requiring minimum standards for "professionals" working with children depend on developing those roles into true professions. Specifically, on developing an agreed body of knowledge and functional skill; on establishing a publically credible testing and credentialing process for each profession; on developing nationwide training processes to qualify students to the required standards; and on maintaining professional credentialing bodies which are seen to maintain those standards. Arguably, this process operates in the medical profession, for doctors and nurses, and for social workers, today. Teaching has failed to achieve this standard. ECE and counselling are further from such a standard. True professionalisation is a major strategic cultural issue.

The issue of minimum standards appears to be more an aspect of the (important) desire for greater recognition of the value of work with children, rather than an effective concept to screen out dangerous adults from contact with children. Proper supervision will detect the dangerous. Recognition, through pay rates for professionals, and the Universal Basic Income as proposed in "The Big Kahuna" for others, appears a better option.

Summary

Minimum qualification standards are largely ineffective. Some screening, and good training and supervision is probably the best immediate option for professionals. Good practical training, including relationship skills, and ongoing supervision and development is important to a successful child support organisation. True professionalisation is a major long term strategic goal.

• **Who should be included in a workforce for children?**

Submission

Both paid and unpaid people who work primarily with children are "in the workforce for children".

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[21] Carl Rogers Client Centred Therapy 1946.   NLP work on rapport. Bandler & Grinder..

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Parents need recognition that they are the primary workforce for children.
The Unconditional Basic Income proposed in the Big Kahuna is an example of an effective method to communicate this recognition, especially if a UBI applies to children. (Perhaps paid to their care-giver until the child reaches age 15)

Summary

The workforce for children includes parents, caregivers, and voluntary and paid child workers.

• What other changes could be made to increase the effectiveness of those who work with vulnerable children?

Submission
Their competence could be shown more respect by the bureaucracy. Caseworkers need good training, and a sound policy framework of desired outcomes within which to operate. However, they also need to have freedom to use professional judgement widely, and be less constrained as to how they achieve those outcomes. Workloads need to be realistic.

• How can the Government's frontline services better connect vulnerable children and their families and whānau with the services they need?

Submission
The key issues are early (sometimes pre-birth) family identification, and prompt access and guidance to the necessary support services.
Plunket & Iwi service providers need service contracts which include identifying those at risk; contracted time to build relationships with and assist those they can help; and provision of access to adequate expertise of various specialist service providers to deal with those who need more specialised help.
Connecting vulnerable children to the services they need will be most effective when a positive relationship exists between an on-going support organisation individual (paid or unpaid) and the family. Sustainable connection depends on sustainable relationships.
Continuity of case worker to client relationships is an important organisational requirement.

Summary

Early identification, and continuity of case worker – client relationship are important to successful intervention.

• What services could be included in this action to better connect vulnerable children to the services they need?

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This is best identified by discussion with fieldworkers of DSW, Plunket & Iwi and similar service providers. Ultimately, families of at risk children working with supporters they trust, will enable the best insights into what is required.

• What other changes do you think could be made to ensure vulnerable children are connected to the services from which they would benefit?

Plunket & Iwi and other service providers could be funded to make "triage" judgements of which parents need, and can benefit from, further help. Supply of specialist services needs to be balanced to the demand, recognising and balancing both the costs of supply, and the costs of delay and failure to supply of those services, and with a view about the expected level of success of those interventions.

• How could early childhood education centres and schools be better used as sites for delivery of a wider range of services?

There are two main approaches to reducing damage to vulnerable children. Short term, this is about improving the parents' parenting skills, and long term it is about helping those children achieve better educational outcomes.

DSW caseworkers, Doctors, Nurses, Teachers, Plunket & Iwi and other service providers are capable of identifying vulnerable children and their parents before or soon after birth. With appropriate resources, they can create support networks for such parents, and guide them to special support services if required.

ECE and primary schools could be developed as a continuing base of parent support through adopting much more intensive practices of seeking out parent involvement with teachers in each child's development. One aspect of this is student engagement, and the focus on enabling students to experience success (rather than failure) is a contributing factor. In an example already quoted, the Granger High School, the Principal set out to build community in a pro-active way by having teachers visit each family to discuss frankly the child's education. (This school had around 90% of students from minority ethnicities.) This over time generated a much higher parent response to attending parent-teacher meetings at the school.

School facilities can be used as a base for some support service delivery (E.g. these might include counselling services for students and parents, primary Health nurses, after school child care for working parents, weekend use by sports teams and cultural groups). Working to create centres of local community around school facilities will benefit children through increased community involvement, and closer parent involvement in their education. The costs of facilities on existing school sites will often be less than new stand alone facilities. The present "silo" organisational structure limits these kinds of experiments and developments, and often imposes price barriers from "silo" optimisation, rather than social

benefit. (We acknowledge that many schools do the best they can to create these communities.)

 Because of the "local" nature of ECE & primary schools, this would improve access to such services for many low income parents.
• **What services could be better connected and how?**

Submission
This is best identified by discussion with fieldworkers.

• ***What other opportunities exist to deliver services more effectively for vulnerable children, and their families and whānau?***

No Submission

CONCLUSION

This submission has responded to the form, as well as the content, of the Green Paper issues.

We believe the scope of the Green Paper is too narrow to elicit the most effective policy solutions to achieve its desired outcome- all New Zealand children thriving, belonging, and achieving. What is missing, in our view, is a series of congruent "big picture" policy objectives for the nation in meeting its obligation to its children.

We submit that enabling all New Zealand children to Thrive, to Belong, and to Achieve, requires a shift in our national cultural attitudes to children, and so to family. It requires acceptance of the individual responsibility for our own children – the responsibility of parenthood- and of responsibility for other children – community awareness, community support, and creating equal opportunity for adults of all backgrounds.

The Government Vision could become the initiation of a process of shifting the national consensus, and so enabling a shift in the accepted cultural views of toleration of child poverty.

These broader views are also set out in a second personal submission by Mr Pearce.