

Report of the

50 Key Thinkers Forum

**SUPPORTING FAMILIES, WHĀNAU
AND COMMUNITIES TO CREATE THEIR
OWN SOLUTIONS: A WAY FORWARD**

families commission
kōmihana ā **whānau**



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CONTEXT

FAMILY AND WHĀNAU SUPPORT: IS THE PROBLEM REALLY THE SOLUTION?

There is continuing debate about how best to support families and whānau in New Zealand.

The recent economic recession has made this issue more acute. Just as the Government's ability to fund services is constrained, family and whānau support needs are increasing. How to allocate the shrinking resources in a time of increasing need will be a major challenge during the next decade.

Previous research and evaluation has identified a number of failings in our support for families and whānau, for example:

- > poor social outcomes (eg child deaths, family violence)
- > fragmented services and lack of coordination between services
- > duplicated services and service gaps
- > support not reaching those most in need
- > poor implementation
- > lack of evidence of effectiveness.

Currently, most funding is premised around the provision of services to families and whānau. Families and whānau are positioned as passive consumers in need of external professional help.

However, families and whānau *do* have many strengths upon which to draw to deal with the problems they face; most *do* know what sort of support they actually need. From a strengths-based perspective, families and whānau are among the most pervasive and important infrastructure that exists in New Zealand. Investment in them would yield social and economic benefits. Families and whānau are the solution, not the problem.

While there is discussion about *current* support needs, there is currently relatively little work being done on the *future* support needs of families and whānau.¹

It is time to accelerate thinking about the social services and support sector. New Zealand must be future-oriented. The Government needs assurance that public investments in support and services will yield the highest possible returns – for children, for their parents and for all of society.

There is nothing wrong in New Zealand that cannot be fixed by using what is right in New Zealand.
 From the opening remarks at the 50 Key Thinkers Forum (with apologies to Bill Clinton)

POINTING THE WAY

50 KEY THINKERS FORUM

The 50 Key Thinkers Forum, hosted by the Families Commission on 11 May 2011, was conceived as a starting point to ignite and reframe thinking about family and whānau support. The forum brought together a collection of innovative thinkers and practitioners from across the social sector to discuss the future of family support in New Zealand.

The forum addressed such issues as:

- > What factors will shape the future support needs of family and whānau?
- > What new support will be needed; what current support may not be needed?
- > How can the most vulnerable families and whānau get the support they need?
- > Which organisations are already innovating and adapting their services to meet future needs?

¹ The Ministry of Social Development is planning work on service demand. Some training organisations have also done work on future skill and training needs.

A strong message emerged from the forum: support for families and whānau in New Zealand needs to be reconceived. Instead of asking how social services can be delivered *to* families by government, we need to explore how families, whānau and communities themselves can be empowered to develop, design and deliver the support that they need. Participants were also unaware of where the social support sector is headed.

Key 'big picture' messages to emerge from the forum were:

1. **Connecting families and whānau with community:** communities need to be active in developing support for families and whānau; New Zealand should build on the foundations of Whānau Ora.
2. **Sharing knowledge and building relationships** through clearinghouses, promising practice profiles and through brokering sustained, trusted relationships.
3. **Innovation** needs to be accelerated to identify and support innovative individuals, organisations and communities and cut through the red tape to connect the connectors and implement the best ideas.
4. **Funding and partnering effectively** is required, with sound evaluation built into programmes from the start; flexible accountability systems and accommodation of networked partnership models.

Each of these ideas is set out in this report with the challenge and response identified, followed by a range of projects as potential next steps to improve support systems that enhance the wellbeing of families and whānau.

Finally, building on the first step initiatives, we further propose the establishment of a specialist group to develop and recommend to the Government a comprehensive suite of policies, initiatives and pathways for the future of family and whānau support in New Zealand.

Every child has a future, every family and whānau can be strong, and every community can be a catalyst for support.

Table 6, 50 Key Thinkers Forum

A WAY FORWARD

PLANNING THE FUTURE WITH FAMILIES AND WHĀNAU AT THE CENTRE

The concepts and first steps outlined in this report will contribute to family and whānau wellbeing. However, none of the ideas by themselves, or collectively, form a plan for the future of family and whānau support.

So, while a one-day forum is a valuable starting point, a more comprehensive mechanism is required to plan the way forward for families and whānau.

To progress thinking about family and whānau support, discussions need to take place in different places and with new people. Think-tanks and taskforces are such places.

Māori already have some whānau models in place, with a strong economic as well as social focus, always looking to long-term sustained wellbeing for whānau, owned and promoted by whānau. The release of the Families Commission report *Whānau Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* in August 2011 will provide an opportunity to focus on 'building pathways together for the future' (the how, what and who).

A specialist group as an instigator of change will put leadership on a different footing. Such groups enable the public, private and philanthropic sectors and universities to join in; encourage think-tanks in other countries to put forward their ideas and experiences; and enable the Government to capture many new ideas and debate from many differing sources. They foster innovation.

The Government has successfully used specialist, collective approaches to establish new mind-sets and shift policy paradigms, for example, the:

- > report from the Chief Science Advisor, Professor Sir Peter Gluckman, which produced: *Improving the Transition: Reducing social and psychological morbidity during adolescence*² in 2011
- > Early Childhood Education Taskforce which produced *An Agenda for Amazing Children*³ in 2011
- > Taskforce on Whānau-centred Initiatives⁴ which delivered: *Whānau Ora: A whānau-centred approach to Māori wellbeing* in 2009.

Importantly, this approach results in a sound evidence-base from which government policy development and implementation can proceed with confidence to strengthen families and whānau, New Zealand's foundational infrastructure.

Building on the first step initiatives set out in this report, we propose that the Government establish a specialists group to develop and recommend to government a comprehensive suite of policies, initiatives and pathways for the future of family and whānau support in New Zealand.

CONCEPT 1

CONNECTING FAMILIES AND WHĀNAU WITH COMMUNITIES

CHALLENGE

Despite many services providing good support to thousands of families and whānau, top-down service delivery can result in short-term fixes for individual families. For many families and whānau this may be all they require. However, for families and whānau with multiple and complex needs, especially where child neglect and abuse occurs, a more effective model is needed.

With support delivered *to*, rather than *with*, those in need, families and whānau can become passive consumers of government-funded services. This can lead to learned helplessness, including intergenerational service dependency. Yet, communities might not always know where to start, or have the tools or resources, to develop the plans and support systems that are relevant to their own families and whānau.

RESPONSE

There needs to be a fundamental rethink on how the nation supports families and whānau. We need to move away from the idea of 'providing a service'. Instead, a stratified approach is envisaged where:

- > **families and whānau** recognise the strengths and resources that they already have within and around them and are actively engaged with their communities in the design of support systems
- > **community and iwi** are instrumental in engaging, embracing and empowering families and whānau through identifying and resourcing their local leaders
- > **service providers** adopt a strengths-based, wrap-around approach to engagement with families and whānau
- > **the Government** continues to supply core services (education, health, employment) that protect society's most vulnerable, including children, our national responsibility; and help grow sustainable economic activities in communities.

Successful outcomes for families and whānau are evident in communities where:

- > places of connection are established (community hubs) and institutions are open to families and whānau (marae, schools)
- > 'any door is the right door' for families and whānau to access the support that they need (interlinked, integrated and aligned support services)

2 <http://www.pmcsa.org.nz/>

3 <http://www.taskforce.ece.govt.nz/>

4 <http://www.tpk.govt.nz/en/in-focus/whānau-ora/taskforce/>

- > influential community leaders stimulate support for families and whānau (quiet connectors)
- > engagement with families and whānau is nurtured over an extended period.

EXAMPLES

In New Zealand, the non-profit organisation Inspiring Communities takes a lead role in growing the recognition, understanding and practice of community-led programmes such as Great Start Taitā⁵ and Tamaki Transformation.⁶

Forum participants provided numerous examples of families and communities, whānau and iwi, who are drawing together to build whānau ora, strength and success including the Victory Village, Nelson; Kōhanga Reo; and Stone Soup, Whanganui.

Internationally, Vibrant Communities⁷ is a successful, community-driven effort to reduce poverty in Canada by creating partnerships that make use of social assets: people, organisations, businesses and governments.

FIRST STEPS

1.1 Families helping families

Individuals go to family and whānau and friends first when they want help. It is important to equip family members and friends with the information and skills they require to provide the help that is needed within their families and whānau.

Project: Develop a family and whānau peer support model where families and whānau help other families and whānau to succeed.

1.2 Family and community hub

One of the most powerful ways of boosting support for families and whānau, is for people and organisations within communities to connect, converse and collaborate. Hubs create and improve community connectedness, encourage community participation and contribute to social cohesion in the local area.

Project: Use the principles developed from the Victory Village and Te Aroha Noa community centre models to design family and whānau-led hubs.

1.3 Connecting the connectors: spreading success

Too often, success in one community remains just that: success in *one* community. Government has a role and responsibility to transfer good practices from resilient and well-connected communities to communities in greater need of support. A public- private sector partnership can work with communities to:

- > spot, support and promote promising practices in connected communities
- > identify and celebrate inspired and inspiring leaders, from any walk of life, who stimulate connected communities
- > host inter-community events and fora to exchange knowledge about the practices that work for families and whānau.

Project: Use models developed by initiatives such as Inspiring Communities to establish a Connected Communities online network where communities can showcase their own success stories and learn from others' and where families and whānau can access tools and information related to their own communities.

1.4 Setting community tables

For communities to come together and develop plans to provide the support systems that local families and whānau need, the conversation needs to shift 'from the kitchen table to the community table'. Community tables bring families and whānau together to commence the dialogue and planning that is relevant to them.

5 <http://www.inspiringcommunities.org.nz/learning-centre/topics-a-themes/community-visions/80>

6 <http://www.tamakitransformation.co.nz/>

7 Vibrant Communities, Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement <http://www.vibrantcommunities.ca/>

Project: Refocus the community response model to provide the support systems that local families and whānau need.

1.5 From community tables to community cabinets

Community cabinets provide a forum for the most powerful body of national representatives, the Government's Cabinet, to meet in communities to discuss strategies to enhance family and whānau wellbeing. Community cabinets, which have operated effectively overseas, recognise communities for their efforts and provide them with an opportunity to influence the national agenda. Meanwhile, the Government gets direct access to the thinking and plans of leaders in engaged and connected communities.

Project: It is proposed that the Government's Cabinet meet (say twice a year) with different connected communities that have developed well-formed plans to support families and whānau.

CONCEPT 2

SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

CHALLENGE

Stakeholders – in government, business, non-for-profit, philanthropic and community organisations – need ready access to information and knowledge about how to improve outcomes for families and whānau in diverse communities.

Despite improvements, there continues to be a lack of access to, or awareness of, good information about the social sector. The forum revealed widespread confusion among service providers about the range and sources of funding.

There is also a disconnect, and often a lack of trust, between government service providers, communities, families and whānau. This might be due to the segregated and siloed nature of government programme funding and accountability requirements, which can undermine providers' abilities to give whole-of-family support.

RESPONSE

Sharing knowledge – Talking to families and whānau is not enough, neither is consultation with families and whānau. Communities need to participate and support design, and have a voice in the funding decisions affecting them. To do this, they must have ready access to up-to-date information about the full range of support models, innovations, promising practices, funding options, news and events.

We need to develop clearinghouses or information hubs that provide online access to the best information available in a specific field. A social services clearinghouse network would:

- > reduce inefficiencies arising from lack of information
- > be a one-stop-shop for service practitioners and policy developers
- > enable users to share information and practices between sectors and places
- > act as a repository for information about promising practices
- > provide information about funding, plans, news and events in the sector.

Building relationships – To support families and whānau, and the most vulnerable within them, strong relationships are required at every level and between all parties. Long-term sustainable benefits are built on long-term sustained relationships; these take dedication and years to nurture.

Closest to families and whānau themselves, local networks of service providers help providers to connect with community; develop understanding of, and relationships with, other agencies; and foster wrap-around approaches for families and whānau in need.

EXAMPLES

Knowledge sharing through clearinghouses is exemplified by the New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse (managed by the Families Commission) and the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia.⁸

A local network example is the Hawkes Bay Teen Parent Agency Network comprising health professionals, educationalists, social agencies and community services. The network assists interagency communication, identification of strengths and weaknesses in service provision and referral pathways to ensure the needs of young teen parents are met.

FIRST STEPS

2.1 Expanding connection through local networks

Local networks of service/support providers build connections and advocacy between health professionals, educationalists, social agencies and community services; provide a forum for regular communication; identify strengths and weaknesses in service provision; and establish referral pathways.

Project: Use the principles developed from study of successful local service networks – such as the Hawkes Bay Teen Parent Agency Network – to develop case studies and share networking stories through clearinghouse networks, promising practice profiles and mentoring schemes.

2.2 Social services clearinghouse network

A network of clearinghouses focused on the social services sector will assist communities, service providers and policymakers with easy access to current, practical information relevant to family and whānau support.

Project: Establish and link clearinghouses as one-stop knowledge shops for the social services sector. The clearinghouse network would provide:

- > research and promising practices on what works for families and whānau
- > effective kaupapa Māori pathways for whānau
- > links to activities funded by ministry, by programme, and by community trusts, philanthropic organisations and corporations
- > international examples that are effective for families and their communities.

2.3 Promising Practice Profiles

Promising Practice Profiles are online knowledge resources and outreach fora that highlight the most effective community and support services models for policymakers, programme managers and for social service practitioners themselves.

Project: Resource agencies to produce and publish Promising Practice Profiles that showcase and explain:

- > different service provision, partnership and funding models
- > social innovations that deliver for families and whānau
- > community-led support systems.

2.4 Relationship brokerage: putting relationships to work

While the Government might ease back over time from extensive provision of social services, it can only do so if other parties work together to fill the breach. In order to work together successfully, those in the social support space need to meet regularly, understand each other's roles and develop respectful, productive relationships.

The Government has a leadership role in brokering relationships that empower communities to provide the support that families and whānau need.

Project: Host or sponsor regional fora, seminars and other opportunities to engage. Sponsor a Connected Communities online network.

CONCEPT 3

EMBRACING INNOVATION

CHALLENGE

There has been more talk than action about using ‘innovative’ approaches to social support to better address existing and unmet needs of families and whānau.

Reasons why innovative thinking has frequently not translated to innovative action in the social services sector include: innovation tends not to be encouraged in the sector; incentives reward compliance over innovation; networks and relationships between sectors are not sufficiently strong; viable innovations are not picked up; and the process of innovation is not completely understood. Where innovations have emerged, they have tended to stay local rather than inform systems-wide changes.

There needs to be a paradigm shift in how families and whānau, communities and service providers work together and in the ratio of government, philanthropic and business sector support for families and whānau.

RESPONSE

Encouraging innovation in the sector involves more than giving those in the social sector permission to be innovative. Incentives for innovation need to be present and barriers to innovation need to be removed. One conceptual barrier that is ripe for removal is the obligation for all innovations to always succeed. Instead, we need to tolerate and learn from innovation failures, while ensuring that safeguards are in place to protect the vulnerable from poorly conceived and/or implemented initiatives.

Creating ‘a culture of innovation’ in the social sector, means:

- > understanding the principles behind successful innovations and the factors that led to failed innovations
- > identifying innovators, wherever they are in the country
- > communicate salient principles, practices and success stories so they can be picked up, modified and used by other communities of family and whānau
- > channelling promising innovations to decision-makers so the best of them can be funded, evaluated and extended.

EXAMPLES

There is a wide range of innovation support systems in New Zealand and internationally, for example:

- > New Zealand Centre for Social Innovation
- > New Zealand Social Innovation Investment Group
- > New Zealand Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Research Centre
- > New Zealand Quality Services and Innovation Fund
- > Australian Centre for Social Innovation
- > Australian Social Innovation Fund
- > Social Innovation Fund, United States.

FIRST STEPS

3.1 Family- and whānau-centred innovative practice principles

Innovative practice principles can be used to help identify innovative practices; evaluate innovative practices; assess innovative promising practice profiles; and to socialise and transfer innovations between communities and even between sectors.

Project: Disseminate family- and whānau-centred innovation principles through papers, seminars and clearinghouses.

3.2 Rapid Innovation Assessment Forum

Innovative ideas can best enhance the wellbeing of families and whānau if they reach the attention of a panel of decision-makers and funding bodies to facilitate development, implementation and evaluation.

Project: It is proposed to establish a Rapid Innovation Assessment Forum to expose viable innovative ideas to senior officials on behalf of the innovators. The forum would provide:

- > a mechanism to assess the viability of innovative ideas quickly
- > provide an 'innovation pipeline' between those engaged in supporting family and whānau and potential funding bodies
- > kick-start evaluations and implementation of innovative supports.

3.3 Social Innovation Unit and Fund

We need to broker and support partnerships between innovators in business, philanthropic, NGO and community sectors to generate innovations that place families and whānau at the centre.

Project: It is proposed to establish a Social Innovation Unit to manage a Social Innovation Fund that directs innovations towards improving family and whānau wellbeing. The unit could:

- > spot innovative projects that advance family and whānau wellbeing
- > manage applications, contracts and investments in innovative projects
- > monitor implementation and facilitate social cost/social benefit evaluation
- > recommend expanded rollout or mainstreaming of successful innovations
- > promote inspired innovations in case studies, seminars, roundtables, etc
- > inform future policy directions and social programmes.

Project: Associated with the Social Innovation Fund, an online consultation platform could provide social enterprise, philanthropic, corporate and government users with a site to share information, network, cultivate dialogue, and to build innovative and effective solutions to social challenges. The site could also be used for formal consultations and other Social Innovation Fund processes.

3.5 Senior innovators

Innovation is not solely the domain of the youthful or business-minded. The professional, innovative and skills capacity of older community members are a rich social resource that can be activated to:

- > connect generations through the life course
- > co-design, and even co-deliver, the support and services
- > transfer mature skills, knowledge and life-experience through mentoring
- > manage volunteer bases within their communities.

Project: It is proposed that a grant scheme is established to invest in representative organisations that engage senior innovator programmes.⁹

⁹ Note: this proposal differs markedly from the SAGES community-based mentoring programme which is on innovation by and for older folk.

CONCEPT 4

FUNDING AND PARTNERING EFFECTIVELY

CHALLENGE

Achieving value for money is an important concern for everyone because public funding for social support and services is limited. Following the recent economic recession and natural disasters, funding availability is even more constrained.

Yet, despite longstanding and substantial government investment in social services, we often do not know if they work from a whole-of-family perspective. When we have evidence that services work, we often do not know why. Often there is a disparity between the development and implementation phases of a service or programme. This makes it difficult to identify future investment priorities or settle on effective funding models. It is noted that in New Zealand:

- > many community-developed programmes have not had the resources to properly evaluate their outcomes to demonstrate cost effectiveness; in turn
- > policy agencies are unable to report on the effectiveness of government investment.

By contrast, international best-practice programmes are frequently well supported by rigorous evaluations and can estimate future savings and calculate social benefits from programme investments.

Historically in New Zealand, governments have been the primary supplier of funding and services in the social sector. While more diverse funding sources can be tapped, direct government funding remains vital to ensure that hard-to-reach and vulnerable families are supported and children are protected.

RESPONSE

As a nation, we need to be smarter about the social services on which public funds are expended and the way in which the funding is sourced and structured.

It is critical in an environment of fiscal restraint that government funding is well targeted, cost-effective and delivers sustained benefits. Evaluation identifies what support works well, what does not, providing evidence to inform investment decisions. It is proposed that the Government build a whole-of-government, best-practice approach to evaluation across the social sector while empowering providers to evaluate local services and respond to local needs.

We need to tap into the financial, intellectual and human resources of a wide cross-section of society including the business, philanthropic, volunteer and community sectors. Funding arrangement and governance models should support partnerships among multiple stakeholders and should facilitate the transfer of resources and decision-making closer to families and whānau themselves.

Incentives can encourage social support organisations to share premises and administration to reduce costs, while also sharing knowledge, building networks and exploring opportunities to collaborate.

EXAMPLES

Current initiatives that are designed to encourage higher trust funding and accountability structures include:

- > Whānau Ora¹⁰ inclusive provision of services and opportunities to whānau
- > High Trust Contracting model and the Community Response Model
- > Reports such as *Good Intentions* and *From Talk to Action* show how the public service can improve consultation processes and create a more respectful and collaborative culture of community engagement.

¹⁰ <http://www.tpk.govt.nz/en/in-focus/whānau-ora/>

FIRST STEPS

4.1 Whole-of-government evaluation

Despite substantial government investment in social services, we often do not know if they work from a whole-of-family perspective. Best practice programmes need to incorporate rigorous evaluations that also identify the downstream savings and cost effects of social initiatives.

Project: Develop a whole-of-government approach to evaluation of social services with the aim of making investment more effective and efficient and improving service quality.

4.2 Local evaluation: local response

Evaluations are equally important at the local and/or community level. It is essential that government agencies work with community groups to gain the knowledge, skills and sound programme models so that they can conduct programme evaluations to inform the development of their programmes and services.

Project: Develop, in collaboration with community providers and researchers, effective evaluative tools for use by community support providers.

4.3 Efficiency dividend for cost-saving efficiencies

Where social service providers demonstrate that they have achieved cost-saving solutions (for example by sharing premises or expertise) an efficiency dividend can return as a financial incentive.

Project: That a programme of financial incentives is provided for service agencies and organisations that simultaneously share infrastructure and costs. For example, 25 percent of the cost savings reported in audited financial reports can be added to the providers' future appropriations, split between participating partners.

4.4 Assess existing mechanisms

While the objectives of community response models and high-trust contracting are supported, in practice there seems to remain a disconnect between the mechanisms and the needs of communities representing families and whānau.

Project: Work with communities to test and refine the models themselves. Any adjustments to funding arrangements should enable providers to access funding that allows them to take a whole-of-family or whānau approach to supporting families.

SPEAKERS

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