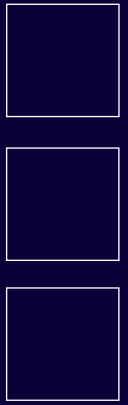




A New Zealand Government Initiative



# CHOICES FOR LIVING, CARING AND WORKING

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A ten-year plan to improve the caring and employment choices available to parents and carers

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The *Choices for Living, Caring and Working* Plan of Action has been developed by a number of government agencies including the Department of Labour, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Maori Affairs, the Treasury, Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

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## FOREWORD

### PRIME MINISTER

The Labour-led government is committed to creating more choices for all New Zealanders as they care for families and loved ones, and seek to achieve personal, family and financial goals. The *Choices for Living, Caring and Working* Plan of Action aims to enhance caring and employment choices over the next decade.

It is vital that families, young and old, share in the progress that New Zealand is making, are secure and have the opportunity to reach their potential. In building a strong future for New Zealand we need to ensure that good policy and workplace practice support today's families to balance work and caring in a range of ways which they can choose to meet their needs.

This plan has been developed in response to what New Zealanders are telling us they want. It is based on research about the choices New Zealand parents and carers are making currently, the choices they would like to make, and evidence about what works best for New Zealand.

It builds on a number of existing government initiatives, such as the Early Childhood Education Strategic Plan, Working for Families, the Work-Life Balance Project, and the Workplace Productivity Agenda, while developing new and exciting proposals in a number of areas.

I am delighted that workplace leaders are championing these measures. This is an exciting and vital Plan of Action which will provide quality outcomes and real choices for all New Zealanders in the future.

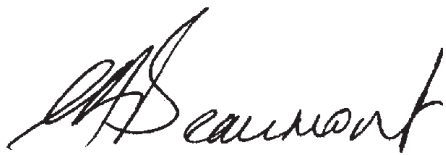


**Rt Hon Helen Clark**

*Prime Minister of New Zealand*

**NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL OF TRADE UNIONS**

New Zealand workers face challenges in balancing paid work with family and caring responsibilities. The NZCTU welcomes the *Choices for Living, Caring and Working* Plan of Action initiative with its vision of helping people make effective choices which meet their individual circumstances. We know that by working together - as individuals, families, unions, employers and government - we can make *Choices* a reality for all New Zealanders. Unions and employers have a vital interest and role in developing and implementing this Plan of Action.

**Carol Beaumont***Secretary**New Zealand Council of Trade Unions***EEO TRUST**

The EEO Trust works with employers to develop versatile workplaces which effectively recruit, retain and reward skilled, committed people. The *Choices for Living, Caring and Working* Plan of Action will increase the choices available to people as they raise their families and care for their loved ones. It will benefit carers, communities and employers by enabling people to contribute as fully as they wish to at work while satisfying their aspirations outside work.

**Philippa Reed***Chief Executive**EEO Trust*

**BUSINESS NEW ZEALAND**

Increasingly businesses understand that to be the best, they need to be inclusive in employment practice. Smart businesses – companies that understand the value of flexible employment practices – have the ability to tap in to employees that others will miss.

We welcome *Choices for Living, Caring and Working* as a contribution to the task of helping spread the message to individuals and businesses about the value of thinking differently about work.

There will always be areas of disagreement among those who are party to workplace issues, however we can agree on an overall aim of an inclusive, flexible workplace that respects and accommodates individual differences.

Business NZ welcomes the conversations that can follow from considering workplace options, and endorses the role of *Choices for Living, Caring and Working* in doing so.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P O'Reilly', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Phil O'Reilly**

*Chief Executive*

*Business New Zealand*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### THE SITUATION: NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY IS CHANGING

The way New Zealanders live, work and raise families has changed enormously over the last generation and is continuing to change.

Women are much more likely to combine work and parenting, and many fathers want to be more actively involved in raising their children. People want to move in and out of paid work as their caring responsibilities change. Parents need to know that their children will be in a high quality, stimulating environment while they are away from family care.

New Zealand's healthy economy means that more people are in the paid workforce, and employers are finding it more difficult to find the skilled workers they need.

In order to help people live, care and work in ways that suit them, and to help attract and retain staff, many employers and unions are working to create workplaces that support parents and carers. Early childhood education and out of school services have also expanded, and the government has introduced and extended access to paid parental leave.

However, there is evidence that many people are unable to satisfy their aspirations for a quality life for themselves and their families while contributing as effectively as they would like to at work.

### THE NEED: PARENTS AND CARERS WANT CHOICES

Balancing work and caring is an issue that faces many New Zealanders, with 43% of employees saying they are responsible for the care of someone, such as a child or elderly relative.<sup>1</sup>

Men and women have told us that they want real choices about how they balance their caring responsibilities, their involvement in paid work, time for leisure and learning, and time to be involved with friends, family and the community.

Of the parents surveyed in the Work, Family and Parenting Study (2006), the majority reported that the arrangements they used worked 'very well' or 'well' for their children. However there were a number of parents who were not currently living their ideal: just under half of households with one partner in paid work would prefer both partners to be in paid work, and around one-third of households where both parents are in paid work would prefer one partner not to be in paid work.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Labour (2006). *Work-Life Balance in New Zealand: A Snapshot of Employee and Employer Attitudes and Experience*. Available at: [www.dol.govt.nz/worklife/snapshot.asp](http://www.dol.govt.nz/worklife/snapshot.asp)

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Social Development (2006). *Work, Family and Parenting Study: Research Findings*. Available at: [www.msd.govt.nz/work-areas/social-research/families-whanau/work-family-and-parenting.html](http://www.msd.govt.nz/work-areas/social-research/families-whanau/work-family-and-parenting.html)

They have also told us they need a range of caring and working options to meet their changing needs throughout their lives.

### **THE VISION: CHOICES FOR LIVING, CARING AND WORKING**

*Choices for Living, Caring and Working* is a vision for workplaces, communities and government to work together to deliver those options. It is a vision of a society that provides New Zealand parents and carers with real choices for living, caring and working that suit their needs, and will:

- achieve quality outcomes for children, families, and others who require care
- achieve greater fairness in opportunities for men and women to participate in high quality work
- enable people to balance their work and other aspects of their lives
- increase productivity and economic growth.

### **THE BENEFITS: BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE, STRONGER ECONOMIC GROWTH**

Improving the options around how we live, care and work has the potential to improve the quality of life for all New Zealanders and boost the country's economic performance.

If parents and carers have better access to quality education and care and can choose more easily how and when they participate in quality paid work, families will benefit emotionally and financially. Children, disabled people, people who are unwell and older people will benefit from a greater range and quality of care and education where appropriate. Quality early education can have life-long benefits for children, as it builds strong learning foundations that create lasting gains in cognitive skills. Communities will reap the benefits of supportive caring environments and better resourced families, and an under-utilised pool of talent will become available to employers.

Providing more choices for parents and carers will also help New Zealand attract and keep the expatriates and skilled overseas workers it needs for the economy to continue to grow.

### **DELIVERING THE VISION: THE CHOICES PLAN OF ACTION**

To deliver the vision, the government has developed a ten-year plan of action that will give parents and carers more choices around balancing caring, paid work and personal time.

The plan is a response to what New Zealanders are telling us they want. It is based on research about the choices New Zealand parents and carers are making currently, the choices they would like to make, and evidence about what works best for New Zealand. It also draws on international experience. It is about providing a continuum of support that meets the needs of families as they move through their lives.



The *Choices* Plan of Action builds on a number of existing government initiatives such as the Early Childhood Education Strategic Plan, Working for Families, the Work-Life Balance Project and the Workplace Productivity Agenda, while developing new and exciting proposals in areas such as out of school services.

The plan has six key areas of activity that will enable people to balance their work and caring responsibilities:

***The first year of life***

Supporting parents who wish to care for their children in their first year of life while taking a break from paid work.

***Children under five***

Ensuring families with children under five can access and participate in high quality, affordable early childhood education.

***School-age children***

Ensuring families have better access to quality, affordable, and age-appropriate out of school services for their school-age children. Such services should be reliable, at convenient locations and should be accessible to children with a disability, and those with other special educational needs.

***Caring for adults***

Improving the choices of the one in five New Zealanders who are caring for adults of all ages, including older people, those with ill health and those with a disability.

***Workplaces***

Encouraging quality flexible work practices that help employers attract and retain skilled staff while assisting employees to balance their family, working and personal lives.

***Monitoring, research and evaluation***

Ongoing commitment to monitoring, research and evaluation: drawing on information about the wishes and needs of parents and carers; providing information to support parents, carers and employers; and monitoring the effects of existing and future initiatives to help ensure the plan is effective over the next ten years.

## INTRODUCTION

This document has two objectives:

- to explain the government's vision for enhancing choices for parents and carers; and
- to outline the *Choices* Plan of Action to deliver this vision.

International research shows that a range of government agencies and partners need to work together to enhance the choices of parents and carers. The agencies involved in developing the *Choices* Plan of Action include the Department of Labour, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Maori Affairs, the Treasury, Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The *Choices* Plan of Action will be implemented in consultation with workplace leaders and community groups to ensure that it makes a real positive difference to the way New Zealanders provide for and care for their families and loved ones over the next decade and beyond.

## WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

### FAMILIES AND CARERS

High quality education and care options and supportive employment arrangements will improve outcomes for families, children, carers, disabled people, people who are unwell and older people.

Currently some families report difficulties in accessing affordable, quality early childhood education, as well as before and after school and holiday services for school-age children. Some new parents return to work earlier than they would like due to financial pressures, and many lack a supportive and flexible working environment that would enable them to be the parents they want to be.

New Zealand has a 'long-hours culture', especially amongst men, and this is having a negative impact on workers.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, fathers have said that they want to be more actively involved in raising their children.

I'm a father and have been for seven years. I had my child when I was 16 years old and I was still at school. I left school just to find a job... I've grown into a young man early by adapting. I wish I could spend more time with my girl but can't get out of work or not enough annual leave, or whatever leave there is. Reality is some kids don't know their Daddy anymore 'coz' he's always at work or trying to impress the boss!!!<sup>4</sup>

The evidence is that some young children don't have access to quality early childhood education at a cost and during the hours that would suit their families best. Such education could help in these children's development, and may have particularly strong benefits if they are from lower socio-economic groups. Some families are restricted in their ability to work because of a lack of access to early childhood education.

Some school-age children aren't receiving adequate supervision outside school hours. This could impact on their development, health and future wellbeing as well as their families, their schools and their communities. A lack of out of school services also limits some families' work choices.

People caring for adults of all ages, including older people, those with ill health and those with a disability, often want to do paid work alongside their care work in order to improve their financial situation and enjoy the other benefits of paid employment. They need care and work arrangements that suit their situation.

### NATIONAL SITUATION

New Zealand's healthy economy and an international skills shortage have propelled employment issues into public debate. Employers are reporting that they find it difficult to find the skilled workers that they need.

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Labour (2006). *Work-Life Balance in New Zealand: A Snapshot of Employee and Employer Attitudes and Experience*. Available at: [www.dol.govt.nz/worklife/snapshot.asp](http://www.dol.govt.nz/worklife/snapshot.asp)

<sup>4</sup> EEO Trust (2003). *What Do Kiwi Fathers Really Want?* On-line survey. Available at: [www.eeotrust.org.nz/research](http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/research)

Regardless of fluctuations in the local economy, the international skills shortage is predicted to continue, largely as a result of ageing populations in developed nations. The pressure is on New Zealand, its government, its workplaces, its workers and their families to find working and caring arrangements that enable people to contribute to their full potential at work while meeting their caring responsibilities and desires for a quality life outside work.

As well as creating greater choice for those living in New Zealand, an environment that enables people to balance their working and caring responsibilities will attract skilled expatriates and immigrants who want to live and work in a country that supports them and their families.

Within the context of an ageing population, a number of factors influence the choices people make about paid work. For example, younger women are much more likely to be in paid work than their mothers or grandmothers were and, like their mothers and grandmothers, they are eventually likely to take on caring responsibilities for elderly relatives. We need to address how employers can recruit and retain skilled and experienced parents and carers, and support people as they move into caring roles.

Maori and Pacific populations bring a different, younger demographic to the workplace, while their higher birth rate means they are likely to have greater caring responsibilities. It is critically important to the country's wellbeing and productivity that Maori people and Pacific peoples can access quality work that enables them to meet their commitments to their families.

We need to make the best use we can of the skills and talents of everyone in New Zealand for whom work is a good choice. Removing barriers for those who would like to participate is a long-term investment in New Zealand's social and economic future.

## **WORKPLACE APPROACHES**

Employers will have access to a wider pool of talent if more people with caring responsibilities are able to enter the workforce or participate in it more fully, and productivity will increase as a result of improved staff retention, reduced absenteeism and greater commitment.

Many employers already offer a range of working arrangements to help them recruit and retain people with caring responsibilities. These arrangements are often developed in an effort to support women to return to work after parental leave. They are also effective in building morale and commitment, and improving employees' health and wellbeing.

Parents say that flexible work arrangements are the main workplace solution that would help them better balance their lives. For example, 79% of respondents to the recent Department of Labour Work-Life Balance in New Zealand report said flexible start and finish times were one of the most helpful initiatives that they have access to and use, and 50% said that knowing that they could leave work in an emergency was helpful.<sup>5</sup> Flexible start and finish times were also the most important initiative for the fathers who completed an EEO Trust online survey in 2003.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Labour (2006). *Work-Life Balance in New Zealand: A Snapshot of Employee and Employer Attitudes and Experience*. Available at: [www.dol.govt.nz/worklife/snapshot.asp](http://www.dol.govt.nz/worklife/snapshot.asp)

<sup>6</sup> EEO Trust (2003). *What Do Kiwi Fathers Really Want?* On-line survey. Available at: [www.eeotrust.org.nz/research](http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/research)

To me time off is everything, and I think we are pushed more and more into losing our free time to spend with family. After all we did have a family to enjoy their upbringing and to be part of their lives.<sup>7</sup>

Flexible work arrangements around hours and location, including quality part-time work, can help parents respond to emergencies, and attend their children's events or appointments.

Parents' responsibilities for children do not disappear simply because they have either found adequate childcare or the children have reached school age. Parents need to be able to put in time with their children when it is required. This means that employers should provide appropriate family-friendly work practices, such as flexi-time and voluntary part-time work.<sup>8</sup>

Supportive and flexible work arrangements, such as providing a range of paid and unpaid leave options, can help carers reach their potential at work and better meet their caring commitments.

Such workplace arrangements may be long-term or short term, and many employers are willing to adjust arrangements to suit people's changing needs over time. These types of arrangements are also likely to assist with recruitment and retention of other workers, such as disabled people and older workers in the transition to retirement. This will become increasingly important as the average age of our workforce increases.

Respondents to a recent EEO Trust survey said they were most likely to be encouraged to continue working past their expected retirement date by quality part-time work and flexible working hours. For most of those still in the workforce, the ideal transition from full-time work to retirement involves part-time work or flexible hours. In contrast, those who are already retired mostly went straight from full-time work to full retirement.<sup>9</sup>

## **GOVERNMENT APPROACHES**

Employers and employees agree that government has a role in helping them adapt to the challenges and opportunities presented by the changing nature of work and family life. For example, government can support workplaces to better meet the needs of parents and carers, and better utilise their skills through providing information and support, and facilitating information sharing between workplaces on what works, especially smaller workplaces. In its role as an employer, government can also set an example of best practice.

Government also has a vital part to play in making appropriate, affordable services more available to parents and carers. It can also provide information about the options, and assist people moving in and out of paid work as their parenting or caring responsibilities change.

In addition, government policies impact on financial incentives around work, parenting and caring options.

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<sup>7</sup> EEO Trust (2003). See footnote 6.

<sup>8</sup> OECD (2004). *Reconciling Earning and Caring: Social Policies for Working Families*.

<sup>9</sup> EEO Trust (2006). *Work and Age Survey* available at: [www.eeotrust.org.nz/research/index.cfm](http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/research/index.cfm)

## WHAT WILL THE *CHOICES* PLAN OF ACTION ACHIEVE?

*Choices for Living, Caring and Working* is a vision for workplaces, communities and government to work together to deliver those options. It is a vision of a society that provides New Zealand parents and carers with real choices for living, caring and working that suit their needs, and will:

- achieve quality outcomes for children, families and others who require care
- achieve greater fairness in opportunities for men and women from all socio-economic groups to participate and progress in high quality, diversified employment
- enable people to balance their work and other aspects of their lives
- increase productivity and economic growth.

The initiatives set out in the *Choices* Plan of Action translate this vision into practical measures that will have a significant impact on New Zealanders and the future of the country. The choices made by individuals about having children, and providing for their care and education, are intrinsic to New Zealand's long-term economic and social wellbeing.

Getting the work/family balance right will be regarded as of vital importance in the years to come. The size and composition of the working-age population has already begun to change, requiring policies to promote increases in paid employment among [parents and carers].<sup>10</sup>

The *Choices* Plan of Action is a co-ordinated combination of measures across government agencies that will help individuals, families and employers adapt to a rapidly changing social and employment environment. It complements and builds on other government initiatives such as the Early Childhood Education Strategic Plan, Working for Families, the Work-Life Balance Project, and the Workplace Productivity Agenda.

Through the *Choices for Living, Caring and Working* initiatives, the government will:

- provide financial support for families to ensure that all children have an adequate standard of living while at the same time optimising returns to work as much as possible
- provide parental leave that assists parents to care for their children themselves in the first year of their child's life whilst keeping a connection to the paid workforce if they wish
- work towards enabling easier access and participation in high quality and affordable early childhood education and out of school services for all children whose parents choose to use them
- identify options to assist parents and carers to return to work after periods of full-time care, including career information advice and guidance, and employment support
- encourage workplace cultures and practices that accommodate the needs of all parents and carers, and use and reward their skills.

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<sup>10</sup> Page 19, OECD (2004). *Reconciling Earning and Caring: Social Policies for Working Families*.

The government's long-term strategy is to increase productivity and skill levels so we move to a high-value, high-wage economy that provides a better standard of living for all New Zealanders. Government recognises that New Zealanders value their families, their relationships and their communities. It is committed to creating economic transformation to improve wellbeing on all levels, reinforcing our pride in ourselves as a nation.

Fundamental to this Plan of Action is the government's commitment to reducing child poverty and assuring a minimum level of family income. The Working for Families package is already helping to ensure a better standard of living for low and middle income families through a number of measures including higher incomes, increasing Childcare Assistance, and the increased Family Assistance tax credit and In-work Payment. The outcomes of Working for Families, including its impact on employment, will be monitored over the next three years as the package is fully implemented.

Other government initiatives, some of which are described in this plan, will also contribute to reducing child poverty. These include increases to early childhood education funding, and looking at the affordability of out of school services, and extensions to paid parental leave.

## THE FIRST YEAR OF LIFE

**The *Choices* Plan of Action will work towards parental leave provisions that support parents who wish to care for their children in their first year of life while taking a break from their paid work.**

Overseas research suggests that women are more likely to return to paid work after the birth of a child if they have the opportunity to take paid parental leave. The research also suggests that the financial costs of providing paid leave are outweighed by the positive effects on the labour market.

Paid and unpaid parental leave increases families' options for providing an intensive level of caring in their baby's first year by ensuring their job remains open to them and providing a payment for part of the year. This recognises the importance of a period of leave for mothers to establish breastfeeding and parents to bond with a new baby. As well as increasing choices for parents, this option can be beneficial for the child, particularly as the first year of a child's life provides a critical foundation for later life.

There is strong evidence that the early experiences of children can have a significant impact on their future welfare, and parental input into child development is important to improve outcomes in later life.<sup>11</sup>

Many working parents can access parental leave of up to 52 weeks including government funded paid parental leave of 14 weeks. The parental leave scheme is currently being evaluated. This includes looking at the experiences of women, partners, and employers and those ineligible for the scheme. This will inform further work to consider how the provision of parental leave can be improved, including duration of leave, entitlement and payment.

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<sup>11</sup> Page 6, OECD (2004). *Reconciling Earning and Caring: Social Policies for Working Families*.



## CHILDREN UNDER FIVE

**The *Choices* Plan of Action will work towards ensuring families with children under five can access and participate in quality, affordable early childhood education.**

Quality early childhood education is beneficial for children, especially those from less advantaged families. More early childhood education options at prices and times that suit families will give parents more choice about undertaking paid work or study in a way that meets their needs and those of their children.

The 2004 Living Standards Survey<sup>12</sup> showed that 22.4% of families with a child under four reported that a lack of access to early childhood education affected adults' ability to work.

Eighty-one per cent of parents in the Work, Family and Parenting study rely on some type of childcare arrangement in order to participate in the workforce.<sup>13</sup>

A number of initiatives to improve access to and quality of early childhood education are already underway, mainly through the Ten Year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education, and the Working for Families package. As a result of these initiatives:

- spending on early childhood education has almost doubled since 2002, to over \$600 million in 2006. This new funding aims to increase participation, improve quality and remove the need for parents to pay higher fees if costs increase
- extra fee subsidies through increased Childcare Assistance are available to more families, and subsidy rates have increased
- from October 2006 income thresholds for Childcare Assistance subsidies will increase, meaning that around 70% of all families potentially qualify for help with early childhood education costs
- since 2001, the government has funded set-up costs for over 3500 new places in existing or new services
- funding and regulation have been reviewed to fit better with parents' needs and to support quality improvement
- from July 2007 up to 20 hours of free early childhood education for 3 and 4 year olds will be available in early childhood services overseen by teachers
- collaboration is being promoted between early childhood educators and other social and education providers
- access to early childhood education for children of teenage parents at school has been improved by fully meeting their costs.

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<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Social Development (2004). Unpublished results of the *Living Standards Survey*. Published report available at: [www.msd.govt.nz/documents/publications/csre/living-standard-2004/living-standards-report.pdf](http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/publications/csre/living-standard-2004/living-standards-report.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Social Development (2006). *Work, Family and Parenting Study: Research Findings*. Available at: [www.msd.govt.nz/work-areas/social-research/families-whanau/work-family-and-parenting.html](http://www.msd.govt.nz/work-areas/social-research/families-whanau/work-family-and-parenting.html)

Proposed actions include:

- continuing to implement the Ten Year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education and the Working for Families package
- improving the applications process for accessing the Childcare Assistance Subsidy
- researching how well existing early childhood education services meet parents' needs
- developing a monitoring framework to assess the affordability and accessibility of early childhood education
- undertaking a stock-take of the effectiveness and efficiency of early childhood education funding arrangements in meeting the goals of this Plan of Action in 2009/2010.

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## SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

**The *Choices* Plan of Action will work towards ensuring parents and carers have better access to quality, affordable, and age-appropriate care for their school-age children. Such services should be reliable, at convenient locations and accessible to all school-age children whose families want them to participate.**

Out of school services provide care for five to 13 year olds outside school hours and during school holidays. Overseas research indicates that good quality out of school services have a generally positive impact on children by improving their school attendance and behaviour. These effects are greater for children with special needs and those from lower socio-economic groups.

In the 2004 Living Standards Survey<sup>14</sup>, 20% of parents reported that the time they could spend in paid work, study or other activities was limited by their children's hours of school and activities after school. The availability of high quality out of school services has a big influence on parents' choices around work.

Working with pre-school children is somewhat easier than with school age children in terms of childcare. School age children have a shorter day than [those] in childcare presenting a different set of issues for working parents.<sup>15</sup>

The government has been investing in out of school services for a number of years, but there is still scope to make quality more consistent and to raise the relatively low participation rates.

Out of school services have the potential to engage children in activities that improve their physical and emotional wellbeing, as well as support their school work.

The *Choices for Living, Caring and Working* Action Plan includes a five-year plan for the out of school services sector which will seek to:

- develop better understanding of the needs and perspectives of parents and children through research and consultation
- develop an appropriate regulatory framework to ensure the provision of quality out of school services, including for disabled children and those with special needs
- develop a co-ordinated funding framework
- identify options for improving the quality of out of school services.

The out of school services action plan will be developed under the guidance of the Ministry of Social Development and is expected to be developed by the middle of 2007.

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<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Social Development (2004). Unpublished results of the *Living Standards Survey*. Published report available at: [www.msd.govt.nz/documents/publications/csre/living-standard-2004/living-standards-report.pdf](http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/publications/csre/living-standard-2004/living-standards-report.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> EEO Trust (2005). *Parenting and Paid Work*. On-line survey. Available at: [www.eeotrust.org.nz/research/index.cfm](http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/research/index.cfm)

## CARING FOR ADULTS

**The *Choices* Plan of Action will work towards improving the choices of the one in five New Zealanders who are caring for adults of all ages, including older people, those with ill health and those with a disability.**

The number of people who care for adults is likely to increase, particularly as our population ages. Like parents, these carers want more choices about how they live and work. Many carers currently identify themselves as 'unemployed'<sup>16</sup> and would welcome the opportunity to combine care with paid employment or look forward to doing paid work when their circumstances allow. Carers of all ages play an important and valuable role. Just as women with older children are now more likely to be in paid employment, so are older carers. As older people are increasingly likely to have caring responsibilities, it is becoming more important to help them balance their caring and working roles.

Many working people are carers and are used to the juggling act that involves. Rigid work patterns and practices have led many carers to feel they have to hide their difficulties. It is not always easy to tell managers or colleagues about the situation you face at home. But remember – 3 out of 5 of us are going to be carers at some time in our lives.<sup>17</sup>

The *Choices* Plan of Action identifies that government, employers, families, carer support services and providers of services to people with disabilities or ill health and older people can all be influential in giving carers more choice.

The issues faced by carers are addressed in the following *Choices* areas of work:

- the Work-Life Balance Project is exploring work-life balance solutions for people with multiple care responsibilities, the provision of additional unpaid leave to carers, and the right to request flexible working arrangements
- the government is currently working to improve services and support for beneficiaries, including those with caring responsibilities.

In addition:

- the Office for Disability Issues and other agencies are undertaking reviews into disability support services
- the government is discussing with the New Zealand Carers Alliance how work on issues for carers could best be taken forward
- carers have identified the need for specific support that would most effectively increase the employment choices of carers based on:
  - more information on carers' priorities for support

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<sup>16</sup> Statistics New Zealand (2001). *Around the Clock: Findings from the New Zealand Time Use Survey 1998-99*. Available at: [www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/8AD45C07-9A77-4C42-AE41-57BBE95CC2B1/0/aroundtheclock.pdf](http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/8AD45C07-9A77-4C42-AE41-57BBE95CC2B1/0/aroundtheclock.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> [www.carers.net.nz](http://www.carers.net.nz)

- analysis of income barriers and other disincentives facing carers who wish to do paid work
- the effectiveness of initiatives in other countries.

## WORKPLACES

### **The *Choices* Plan of Action will encourage flexible workplace practices that enable employers to better access the skills and energies of parents and carers.**

While these practices give parents and carers more choice around paid work, they also benefit employers by increasing the pool of potential employees, helping retain skilled staff, and building loyalty and commitment.

Productivity gains will come from making it easier for parents and carers to work in jobs that use their skills, switch between full-time and part-time work, and return to the workforce after a break.

Harrison Grierson, a multidisciplinary engineering consultancy, reports that work-life balance initiatives have assisted with the recruitment and retention of women resulting in a 68% increase in female employees from 2000 to 2005.<sup>18</sup>

Employers do not carry sole responsibility for creating more flexible workplaces. Employees, unions and government all have a part to play in creating work environments and cultures that enable parents and carers to contribute fully at work and move easily in and out of paid work as their needs change.

Initiatives that are already underway in this area include:

- the Workplace Productivity Agenda, which is being undertaken by business, employee representatives, unions and the government to develop diagnostic tools, build capacity, research and evaluation, and will raise awareness around productivity issues
- the Work-Life Balance Project, a three-year programme focussing on workplace practices and cultures. This project includes The Workplace Project which is trialling customised work-life balance tools in a number of workplaces. A recently published Department of Labour report on employers and employees explored the awareness, provision and uptake of work-life balance initiatives.<sup>19</sup> A range of other work-life projects are being undertaken
- a project to support flexible workplace cultures and practices through, for example, working with champions and key influencers to increase understanding and adoption, providing information, and identifying persistent barriers to workplace flexibility
- the Pay and Employment Equity Plan of Action seeks to remove barriers to employment equity for women and ensure remuneration is free of gender bias in the public sector
- a Work and Income programme which is assisting sole parent beneficiaries into employment through enhanced case management
- early childhood education access for the children of teenage parents at school has been

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<sup>18</sup> Harrison Grierson were the winners of the EEO Trust Work & Life First Steps Award in 2005. Source: EEO Trust.

<sup>19</sup> Department of Labour (2006). *Work-Life Balance in New Zealand: A Snapshot of Employee and Employer Attitudes and Experience*.

improved by fully meeting their early childhood education costs

- statutory provision for holiday entitlement will be four weeks from 2007
- research is being undertaken by the Department of Labour and the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women on the decisions parents and carers make about paid work
- research is being undertaken by the Department of Labour on people over the age of 45 who are out of the workforce, and how employers can better attract and utilise the skills of non-traditional labour
- analysis of the results from the annual Statistics New Zealand Business Operations Survey (BOS) for 2005 and 2006, to examine the associations between firm performance (including productivity) and a wide range of business and employment variables, including flexible work practices.

New and proposed initiatives include:

- a large scale pilot in the public sector to identify strategies for increased uptake of quality flexible work. This pilot will include a range of occupations and roles
- investigating the costs and benefits of giving parents and carers an entitlement to unpaid leave (separate from parental leave)
- identifying options to assist parents and carers to return to work after periods of full-time care, including through careers advice, information and guidance, which may include job search assistance, training and job placement. This could include assisting employers to recognise the potential of parents and carers as employees
- research into the impact of mothering on employment outcomes, including comparing hourly wages of mothers with other women and comparing the work hours of men and women
- research on enhancing men's choices about combining paid work and caring responsibilities.

## MONITORING, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

**The *Choices* Plan of Action includes an ongoing commitment to monitoring, research and evaluation: drawing on information about the needs of parents and carers; providing information to support parents, carers and employers; and monitoring the effects of existing and future initiatives.**

Ongoing research and monitoring will ensure we are meeting the real needs of New Zealanders with caring responsibilities. It will inform future initiatives and provide valuable information to businesses, unions, families, parents and carers about the implications of the choices they face, assisting them to decide what employment and caring arrangements will work best for them or their business.

A significant wave of new information is becoming available in coming months, including:

- qualitative research on parents' and carers' decision-making about paid work
- research into parents' decision-making around participating in early childhood education and out of school services
- results of the parental leave evaluation
- research into people aged over 45 who are not in the labour market.

In addition, we need to know about:

- the impact of caring on employment and incomes over a lifetime
- the degree to which part-time paid work uses the skills of carers
- the availability and affordability of early childhood education and out of school services
- parents' and children's needs around out of school services
- how to enhance men's choices about work and family.

We also need to improve our understanding of the relationship between early childhood education and work, and we are proposing to repeat the 1998 Childcare Survey to help with measuring progress, and provide a basis for policy development in the future.

It is acknowledged that that Maori and Pacific peoples will play an increasingly important role in New Zealand's future workforce but we do not know enough about how to increase their employment choices and enable them to more readily reach their potential at work. We also need to better understand the needs and priorities of Maori and Pacific peoples with caring responsibilities to ensure that services and policies meet their needs.<sup>20</sup>

The *Choices for Living, Caring and Working* Plan of Action has been developed to improve the lives of all New Zealanders as they move in and out of caring roles and paid work. It will make practical differences to the lives of parents and carers over the next decade and beyond, and it will contribute to long-term community well-being and business success.

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<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs (2006). *Pacific Women's Economic Well-Being Project: Summary Report*. Available at: <http://www.mwa.govt.nz/news-and-pubs/publications/pacific-women-summary.html>