



**families** commission  
kōmihana ā **whānau**

innovative practice fund

## **connections:** supporting family relationships through schools and workplaces

SUE QUINN AND ANNA MOWAT  
PRESBYTERIAN SUPPORT  
UPPER SOUTH ISLAND

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE FUND NO 7/10  
NOVEMBER 2010

**The Families Commission was established under the Families Commission Act 2003 and commenced operations on 1 July 2004. Under the Crown Entities Act 2004, the Commission is designated as an autonomous Crown entity.**

**The Commission's Innovative Practice Fund promotes research on new ways to improve the effectiveness of family-based services. The emphasis is on projects that have a strong rationale and are designed to produce measurable improvement in at least one important aspect of family functioning.**

**For more information on the Innovative Practice Fund, visit [www.nzfamilies.org.nz](http://www.nzfamilies.org.nz)**

Innovative Practice research reports, which result from studies funded under the Families Commission's Innovative Practice Fund, are produced by independent researchers. The content of the reports and the opinions expressed by the author/s should not be assumed to reflect the views, opinions or policies of the Families Commission.

This report is copyright to the Families Commission. The copyright-protected material may be reproduced free of charge for non-commercial personal use without requiring specific permission. This is subject to the material being reproduced and attributed accurately and not being used in a misleading context. Requests and enquiries concerning the reproduction of information for any purpose other than personal use, requires the permission of the Families Commission.

Families Commission  
Public Trust Building  
Level 6, 117-125 Lambton Quay  
PO Box 2839  
Wellington 6140

Telephone: 04 917 7040  
Email: [enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz](mailto:enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz)  
[www.nzfamilies.org.nz](http://www.nzfamilies.org.nz)

ISSN 1177-8172 (Print)  
ISSN 1177-8180 (Online)

ISBN 978-0-478-34922-1 (Print)  
ISBN 978-0-478-34923-8 (Online)

***families*** commission / innovative practice fund  
kōmihana ā ***whānau***

**connections:**  
supporting family relationships through  
schools and workplaces

SUE QUINN AND ANNA MOWAT  
PRESBYTERIAN SUPPORT  
UPPER SOUTH ISLAND

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed to this report.  
Particular thanks to:

- > the principals and staff of the schools  
Connections has worked with who have given energy and life to the goal of supporting families through schools
- > parents who shared experiences with us and contributed to the school initiatives
- > the young people who trusted us with their views
- > participants from the 'It's About Time' conference, and the EEO Trust for co-hosting the conference
- > PSUSI staff who completed questionnaires
- > Simon Smith, Kaye Vessey and Jaden Milligan for their editorial help
- > David Stuart, from the Families Commission for his editorial help and guidance

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>2</b>	2.7 Workplaces: Research methods	22
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>5</b>	2.7.1 Family Leave surveys	22
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>	2.7.2 Conference surveys	22
1.1 PSUSI experience	10	2.7.3 Case notes	22
1.2 Literature and context	10	2.8 Workplaces: Scope of participation	22
1.3 Connections' response	12	<b>3. Findings</b>	<b>23</b>
1.4 Innovative aspects	12	3.1 Supporting families through schools	23
<b>2. Methods</b>	<b>14</b>	3.1.1 Schools: Background and context	23
2.1 Action research	14	3.1.2 Schools: Outcomes	24
2.2 Mapping the action research cycle	15	3.1.3 Organisational learning	29
2.3 Supporting families through schools: Schools service methods	17	3.1.4 Schools: Limitations	39
2.3.1 PTA	17	3.2 Supporting families through workplaces	40
2.3.2 Groups	17	3.2.1 Family Leave: Background and context	40
2.3.3 Courses	18	3.2.2 Family Leave: Outcomes	41
2.3.4 Family school events	18	3.2.3 Family Leave: Learning	49
2.3.5 Tailor-made family support	18	3.2.4 Family Leave: Limitations	50
2.3.6 Special projects	18	3.2.5 Conference: Background and context	51
2.3.7 Across-school communication	19	3.2.6 Conference: Outcomes	51
2.4 Schools: Research methods	19	3.2.7 Conference: Learning	53
2.4.1 School parent survey	19	3.2.8 Conference: Limitations	54
2.4.2 Participant evaluations	19	<b>4. Discussion</b>	<b>56</b>
2.4.3 Parent focus groups	19	4.1 Supporting families through schools	56
2.4.4 Principal interviews	19	4.1.1 Implications for schools	58
2.4.5 Young people interviews	20	4.1.2 Implications for community agencies	59
2.4.6 Case notes	20	4.1.3 Implications for government and policy	60
2.4.7 Researcher's case notes	20	4.1.4 Relationship between school and work	61
2.4.8 Information analysis	20	4.2 Supporting families through workplaces	61
2.5 Schools: Scope of participation	20	4.2.1 Workplace: Implications for workplaces	64
2.6 Supporting families through workplaces: Service methods	21	4.2.2 Implications for service agencies	65
2.6.1 Workplace initiative 1: Family Leave	21	4.2.3 Workplace: Implications for policy	65
2.6.2 Workplace initiative 2: 'It's About Time' conference	21	<b>5. Conclusions</b>	<b>67</b>
		5.1 Summary of schools stream	67
		5.2 Summary of workplace stream	67
		5.3 Potential future approaches	69

<b>References</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Rua whole school survey</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Participant evaluations</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Appendix 2A: Multilingual parent school partnership meeting evaluation</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Appendix 2B: Example of parent group evaluation</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Appendix 2C: Creative drama group evaluation</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Parents' focus group questions</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Questions for principals</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Appendix 5: Interviews with young people</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Appendix 6A: Pre family leave survey Survey on work-family issues</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Appendix 6B: Post family leave survey family leave survey</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Appendix 7A: Pre conference questionnaire</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Appendix 7B: Post conference questionnaire</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Appendix 7C: Action implementation survey</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Appendix 8: How schools can support families and encourage increased parental involvement</b>	<b>101</b>



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

Presbyterian Support Upper South Island (PSUSI) is a social service agency whose strategic mission incorporates helping families to flourish and function well. Practice-based research led PSUSI to realise that many families suffered from 'relationship poverty'. Families sometimes struggled to get on with each other, and parents often felt tired, stressed and isolated from the institutions that could support them. Developing meaningful connections with other people was seen to play a key part in addressing this.

In further community research, PSUSI identified that lack of time and work issues provided significant challenges for households. In particular, lack of time was seen as a sizeable barrier to people accessing community services and facilities.

Workplaces and schools play a crucial part in many of our day-to-day lives as children and parents. These environments, and the relationships people have in them, can also play a role in supporting families.

### Aim

PSUSI's action research initiative was named Connections. The overarching aim of Connections was to provide further support for families through primary schools and workplaces by strengthening relationships between:

- > family members (particularly parents and their children)
- > schools and parents
- > employees and employers
- > families and their support networks (in particular other parents, and a social service agency).

In addition, Connections sought to generate information in response to the listed questions:

- > Can families be supported through schools, and if so how?
- > Can families be supported through workplaces, and if so how?
- > What incentives and mechanisms would encourage further uptake of family-friendly initiatives in the workplace?

### Service methods

Originally, Connections proposed to pilot and evaluate one method of supporting families, through changes in the workplaces and schools of parents who volunteered to be part of the pilot. The Connections coordinator would then contact the parents' employer to arrange for them to have paid time off work so they could be involved with their child's/children's schools. However, after feedback from stakeholders, it became evident this method was unpopular as no parents volunteered.

Connections subsequently evolved its approach and in its revised form, worked across two distinct streams – schools and workplaces. Connections became the umbrella project for those two streams. An employee from PSUSI (hereafter referred to as the Connections worker) carried out most of the Connections activity in the schools and workplace streams. In the schools stream, Connections worked with five primary schools. In the workplaces stream there were two projects:

- > Family Leave in the PSUSI work place
- > a conference about family-friendly workplaces

These streams are discussed below and their relationship to the research methods and outcomes is shown in Figure 1.

### Schools

The Connections worker spent time in five primary schools developing services from a community development perspective, according to the focus and interest of each school community. Although the services delivered in each school were unique in many ways, they can be classified under the broad categories of:

- > PTA involvement
- > group contributions such as facilitation, organisation or membership
- > course facilitation, purposefully involving contact with both young people and parents
- > event organisation for families within schools
- > tailor-made family support
- > cross-school communication through writing and circulating a newsletter, called *What's The Buzz*. This contained information about supporting families and parent-school relationships, and had the impact of cross-pollinating ideas between schools

- > special projects, such as idea exploration, involving schools becoming connected with their communities.

## Workplaces

Connections undertook two approaches (interventions) to support families through workplaces. Firstly Family Leave was implemented in PSUSI. Family Leave was 20 hours additional paid annual leave, able to be taken in any time increments, for the specific purpose of staff being with their families. Family Leave was allocated to all staff on a pro-rata basis. Secondly, PSUSI held a conference in conjunction with the EEO Trust, where information on family-friendly workplaces was made available to other employers and employees.

## Research methods

Research in schools included interviews, focus groups and surveys with principals, parents and young people. In addition, participant evaluations were conducted after some events, all courses and during the normal conduct of some group meetings.

Research on the workplaces stream involved gathering pre- and post-intervention survey data from conference attendees and PSUSI employees.

Data were predominantly analysed thematically and assessed against outcomes. Lessons learnt, or organisational learning, was used to inform service development and the broader debate about future approaches to supporting families through schools and workplaces. Organisational learning also speaks to what enables innovative practice.

## Findings

### Outcomes

The findings show there are many ways of effectively supporting families through schools and workplaces, as long as schools and workplaces recognise the value of parenting and are open to playing a role in supporting families. Although the methods of supporting families are diverse, they can largely be mapped against common outcomes. These are:

- > increasing family time
- > strengthening family relationships
- > strengthening relationships between parents and schools

- > enhancing families' support networks
- > cross-pollinating ideas between schools
- > enhancing employees' work-life balance
- > strengthening employer-employee relationships
- > organisational benefits for PSUSI
- > furthering the adoption of family-friendly initiatives in the workplace
- > raising conference participants' knowledge about family-friendly initiatives.

### Organisational learning

Community agency involvement in schools increases the resources that schools have at their disposal to support families. It can enable schools to increase parental involvement, strengthen parent-school relationships and more effectively support families. Research showed that parents and schools valued having staff from a community agency helping and connected to the school.

Community agency involvement in school also provides agencies with a chance to proactively connect with young people and parents, reaching some parents who are traditionally hard to reach. For example, facilitating courses for young people can provide the opportunity for home visits with parents. Staff from community agencies can then create opportunities for parents to meet and mix with other parents. Relationships develop based on shared experiences, trust and working together. In turn this helps parents increase their support networks and feel comfortable asking for more in-depth services or help when they experience difficulties. In this way, proactively fostering relationships effectively supports parents and can contribute to crisis prevention.

The outcomes showed a number of relationships were strengthened through agency involvement in schools. Relationships between family members were strengthened, and parents' relationships with the school and with each other were also enhanced by PSUSI's ability to include and involve more parents within the school setting. A common theme amongst parent group respondents was that belonging to the group helped reduce this sense of isolation and restore hope.

Connections research showed that work and lack of time are the most significant barriers to parental



involvement in school. Children seemed well aware that parents often could not be involved because of work commitments. Some principals also spoke of work affecting parents' availability. Children, parents and schools all wanted parental involvement in school, and some children expressed a desire for their parent/s to be more involved with school life.

Working parents were not comfortable with the idea of the Connections coordinator approaching their employers, asking for time off work to be involved with schools. Instead, PSUSI implemented Family Leave in its own workplace, and held a conference for other employers and employees, to increase the uptake of family-friendly initiatives.

Family Leave enhanced employees' work-life balance significantly. In addition, a large proportion of employees agreed that Family Leave had enabled them to care for and support their family, share things with family that they would normally miss out on and feel more connected to their family members and their family's community. However, the greatest amount of agreement was over how employees felt treated by their employer; almost 90 percent of respondents agreed that Family Leave had made them feel more valued and supported as an employee.

Thirty-four percent of Family Leave users spent their Family Leave involved with their family in school settings, showing that this workplace change did increase parental participation in school. Other literature also finds an interrelationship between workplace practices and schools. Family-friendly initiatives around flexible hours are sought after to enable greater parent participation in school life, facilitate easier school pick-up and drop-offs or to enable parents to care for their children when they are not at school (Zodgekar & Fursman, 2008). Flexible work arrangements were seen as increasing quality family time, reducing parental stress levels and contributing towards better child development and better family relationships (Zodgekar & Fursman, 2008).

Research from the 'It's About Time' conference suggested a variety of mechanisms could help increase the uptake of family-friendly initiatives in the workplace. Benefits to internal workplace dynamics were seen as most influential, but external incentives, such as positive publicity for the workplace, family-friendly branding and tax incentives were also seen by many as

useful tools to encourage more workplaces to become family-friendly.

The schools and workplaces involved in this study all thought they had an important role to play in supporting families. However, the relationship isn't one-way – schools and workplaces reaped many benefits from supporting families. Schools said families were crucially important to what happened at schools, and they needed families well supported. Schools benefited from increased opportunities to connect with parents, increased parental involvement in the school and increased support for families. Payoffs for the employer reported by the participants included staff feeling more connected to and positive about the organisation, increased staff loyalty, increased staff satisfaction, increased staff productivity and reduced staff turnover.

Across both schools and workplaces a number of factors were identified as enabling families to be successfully supported. These were:

- > the range of opportunities/initiatives offered to employees/families
- > the flexibility and responsiveness of initiatives
- > a positive workplace/school culture
- > effective communication
- > sufficient resource capacity
- > leadership and management support (in the case of schools, staff support)
- > working in partnership/collaboration.

Another factor was initiative-specific aspects, where, for example, affordability, the 'fun' factor, timing, incentives to take part and ease of access made the initiative successful.

Other features that enabled the Connections response to support families effectively were:

- > a non-prescribed approach that was flexible and responsive to the different needs of each community
- > a commitment to working holistically, and seeking to incorporate other key players (people or institutions) in individuals' lives
- > an approach rooted initially in building positive relationships, rather than a response to identified problems.

## Implications and potential future approaches

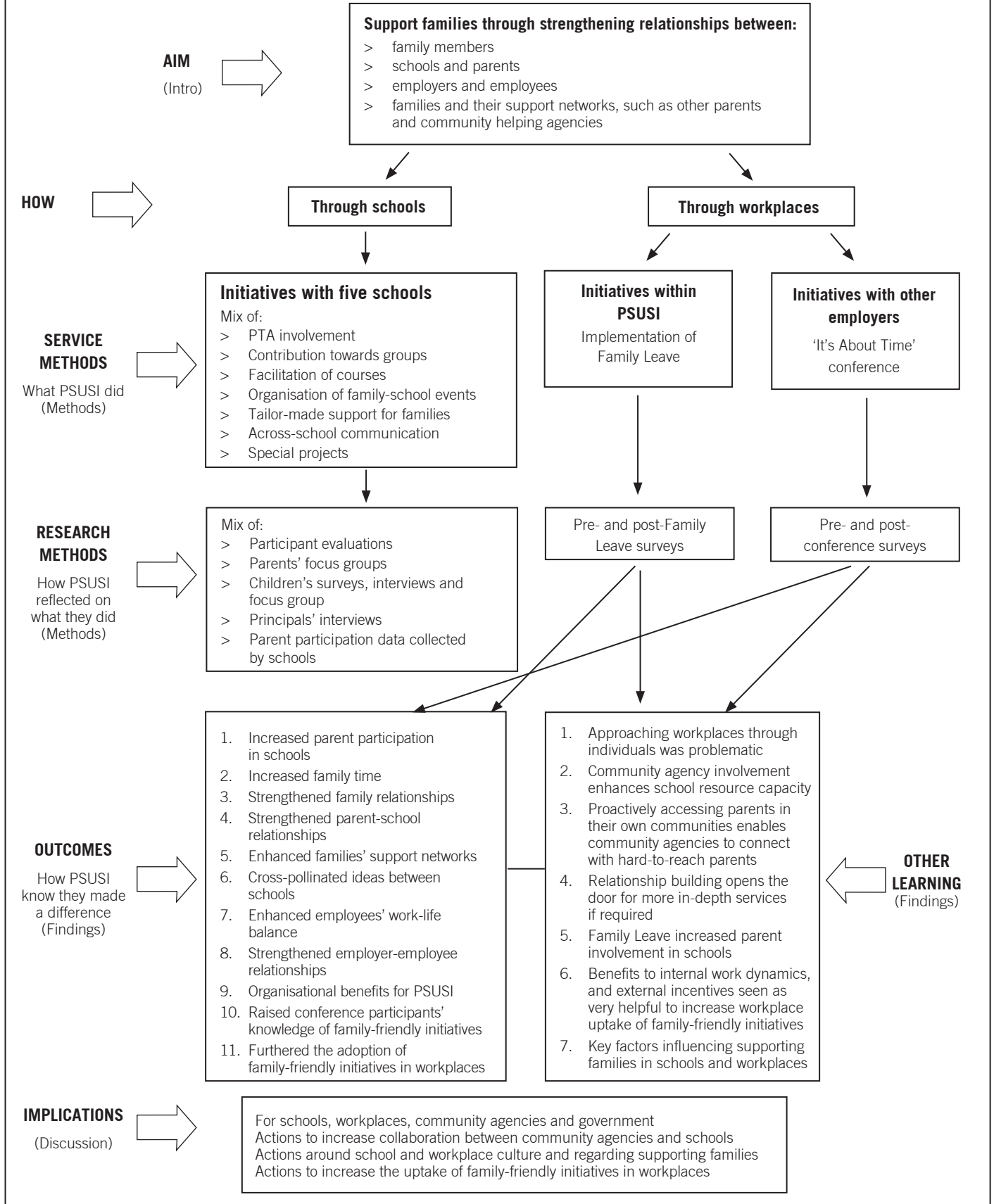
Work and school continue to be key environments in the lives of many families, and the relationship between these environments and families is characterised by interdependence. Connections research shows there is considerable opportunity to support families more effectively through these environments. An examination of the literature suggests that, despite the benefits of family-friendly initiatives within workplaces, uptake of such initiatives is still patchy. It also suggests greater focus and collaboration is needed to effectively support families through schools.

Promising future approaches to supporting families involve a variety of initiatives:

- > Schools could develop approaches that are focused on building positive relationships with parents, such as providing opportunities for interacting with parents including outside core school hours. Partnerships with parents need to be based on two-way communication and responsiveness to parents wants and needs.
- > Community agencies could partner with schools and work in proactive ways to develop relationships with parents. This enhances community development and makes it easier for parents to access a range of supportive services.
- > More workplaces could introduce family-friendly initiatives. The findings show that the introduction of a family-friendly standard, along with an appropriate tax incentive, could help increase uptake of such initiatives. Similarly, offering workplaces free access to individualised consultancy services could aid this process.
- > Government agencies could undertake a strategic commitment towards supporting families through schools and workplaces and improve parental involvement in schools. This could involve providing appropriate financial or physical resources to:
  - encourage the uptake of family-friendly initiatives in more workplaces
  - enable more community agencies to work collaboratively with schools, in ways that are appropriate for each school
  - enable more collaboration between individual schools
  - provide professional development for teachers regarding parental involvement and relationship building
  - enable schools to monitor and report on how satisfied or supported students, parents and staff feel.

**FIGURE 1: Overview of Connections**

Figure 1 provides a diagrammatic overview of Connections, tracing the aims, service and research methods through to the outcomes, organisational learning and implications. The relevant section which explains each stage in further detail is identified in brackets under each heading (eg (Intro) (Methods) etc).



# 1. INTRODUCTION

Presbyterian Support Upper South Island (PSUSI) is a social service agency, working to make a lasting difference for families by helping them to flourish and function well. PSUSI has service centres in Christchurch, Rangiora, Ashburton, Nelson and Blenheim, with over 7,000 clients accessing services. As a registered charity, PSUSI employs 350 staff across the Upper South Island. PSUSI's core services are social work, counselling, home-based support and group activity programmes. Recently PSUSI has purposefully worked more with families in their own communities.

Connections was developed in response to concerns identified through practice-based research, and the experiences of families and PSUSI staff working with them. This section of the report maps the journey of Connections' development. It also provides a brief overview of both the Connections service and the rest of this report.

## 1.1 PSUSI experience

Practice-based research led PSUSI to believe that many families were suffering from a lack of healthy relationships; in other words, relationship poor. PSUSI conducted qualitative research into youth anger, speaking with 34 young people, nine parents and 40 professionals working with young people within a variety of contexts. This research showed relationships were often fraught, and difficulties in relating (communicating and interacting with each other) were the key contributor to youth anger (Quinn, 2009). Parents spoke of feeling stressed and stretched, with some saying a lack of time and energy impacted on their parenting. At times families seemed at war with each other.

Many young people spoke of difficulties experienced in school, and several parents said they did not feel adequately supported by the school. In turn, schools were sometimes reporting a lack of parental support, and PSUSI workers reported some schools were finding it hard to engage with some parents. There was a number of parents they rarely saw, known as 'gate parents', whose interaction with the school generally revolved around dropping their children off at the gate and picking them up.

Family workers also reported difficulty with getting parents involved in school activities. They felt in general

that parents were busier and combining parenting with other commitments such as work. Despite this, parents expressed a need for further social support, and a desire to access social services earlier, 'before the crisis happened'. In order for family workers' clients to flourish and function well, it became clear that relationships between various parties needed strengthening, and that families would benefit from spending more time together. In addition, schools and parents shared an interdependent relationship, and there appeared to be real value in nurturing this relationship.

Broader research, conducted within the Mairehau community, alerted PSUSI to the interplay between time and relationships (Milligan & Jillings, 2006). Results from a randomised survey, responded to by about one in every 12 households, indicated lack of time and work provided great challenges for households. Respondents also identified lack of time as a significant barrier to accessing services in the community. Isolation was more prevalent than had perhaps been expected. PSUSI started to consider the impact of lack of time and work on relationships, and wondered if changes around time and work could contribute towards relationship building.

## 1.2 Literature and context

Nationally, there is evidence to suggest work is increasing its influence on the lives of families. Census data tell us a higher proportion of women are in the workforce (Ministry of Social Development, 2004). A large number of those employed have caring responsibilities, predominantly caring for children, but also caring for the ill, disabled or older parents. Many people are also working longer hours than previously. Family data show that the proportion of families with dependent children that have one parent working long hours has increased considerably across the 1981 to 2006 period (Cotterell, von Randow, & Wheldon, 2008). This increase was even more pronounced for families with at least one Māori parent.

Ultimately, workers in New Zealand work very long hours compared with their OECD counterparts (Callister, 2005).

As time is a limited resource, this impacts upon families. Australian research has claimed that changing working patterns, particularly towards working long, atypical or irregular hours, has contributed to a general decline in the wellbeing of relationships, particularly family relationships. Atypical working

patterns are associated with negative health outcomes such as strained family relationships, parenting marked by anger, inconsistency and ineffectiveness and reduced child wellbeing (Relationships Forum, 2007).

In New Zealand, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), the Families Commission, the Department of Labour (DOL) and the Equal Employment Opportunities Trust (EEO Trust), are among many who are interested in the interplay between work and home life. The negative spill-over effects of work on home life are well documented. For a number of working parents these include:

- > being too tired to do things that require attention at home
- > being distracted by work worries at home
- > difficulty being involved with children's schooling
- > a reduced amount of family time
- > less enjoyable and more pressured family time
- > difficulty looking after sick or dependent others (Colmar Brunton, 2006).

Sixty-one percent of working parents felt they had missed out on some of the rewarding aspects of being a parent because of work (Colmar Brunton, 2006). They also felt work contributed towards missing out on time with their partner and the extended family. A 2004 EEO Trust survey found that 64 percent of respondents said paid work had negatively affected the amount of time they spent with their partner, and 53 percent said it negatively affected the quality of that time (McPherson, 2004). Similarly, DOL research found "a key area that was sometimes missing (from individuals' work-life balance) was spending quality time with their families" (UMR Research, 2003, p. 35).

Investment in quality family time helps family members to feel supported and cared for, and develop healthy emotional connections or bonds with each other. A close and caring relationship with an adult is one of the most important predictors of good health and wellbeing for young people (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003). Healthy family relationships also contribute towards parental wellbeing and enhance family resilience (Kalil, 2003).

Many parents and young people express a desire to spend more time with each other and a number of working adults have expressed a desire to have a better

work-life balance (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003; EEO Trust, 2003b). Large-scale New Zealand research identified that many teenagers want more time with at least one parent. The New Zealand Aotearoa Adolescent Health and Development Association (NZAAHD) states Youth 2007 showed that 45 percent of teenagers wish they could spend more time with their parents (NZAAHD, Autumn 2009). In addition, while about 71 percent of young people indicate they are happy with how they get on with family members, there is much room for improvement. An EEO Trust survey of 1,200 dads found 80 percent wanted to spend more time with their children. One dad said, "I wish I could spend more time with my girl, but can't get out of work or annual leave or whatever there is. The reality is some kids don't know their daddy any more 'cos he's always at work trying to impress the boss" (EEO Trust, 2003b).

Work environments are clearly influential on employee wellbeing. For employees with carer responsibilities, work environments are even more important and work-life balance more challenging (Department of Labour, 2006a). There is a strong body of research evidence showing a positive relationship between the implementation of flexible workplace and work-life initiatives and positive outcomes for workplaces (Business New Zealand, 2007; Department of Labour, 2008c; EEO Trust, 2007; McPherson, 2007). Research also indicated the types of family-friendly initiatives people want. These include occasional and regular flexibility in start and finish times, additional paid leave, flexible breaks, flexibility in choosing work hours, flexibility to have time off during the day, unpaid leave, study leave, occasionally working from another location, less work pressure, access to a phone to keep in touch with family, support to take parental leave entitlements and more support from senior management for employees as fathers (Department of Labour, 2008a; EEO Trust, 2003b).

Despite the benefits of family-friendly initiatives, the availability and uptake of such initiatives is patchy. As of 2006, the most representative survey conducted is the 2005 National Work-Life Balance Survey, which surveyed 1,100 employers and 2,000 employees respectively (Department of Labour, 2006b). This showed that a number of work-life initiatives were not available to any employees, while many other initiatives are available to only some staff and not others. The only

initiatives offered to all staff by more than 40 percent of employers were:

- > study leave
- > flexible break provisions
- > using personal sick leave to care for other people who are sick
- > varied start and finishing times to deal with problems outside work (Department of Labour, 2006b).

A subsequent update shows that, although on average employees' work-life balance may have improved, there is still some way to go in broadening access to a variety of work-life initiatives, with flexible working arrangements often only being offered to some employees (Department of Labour, 2008a).

Reflecting on its experience, the literature and the context, PSUSI believes families need further support. In this context, support is defined as emotional, practical or systemic help that enables families to flourish and function well. PSUSI wondered what could enable families to spend more time together fostering relationships. What could help workplaces adopt further family-friendly initiatives and what could help parents to take up these initiatives? Both parents and schools were expressing a desire for parents to spend more time in schools, and PSUSI wanted to explore how changes in the workplace could enable this.

### 1.3 Connections' response

The Connections' response aimed to help families build enduring support networks through developing positive and meaningful relationships with others. To achieve this, service activity was undertaken in two streams: schools and workplaces. A community development approach was adopted. Action research was conducted to establish the effectiveness of work being undertaken, and to promote responsiveness to feedback. The service and research methods used within each stream are outlined in greater detail in the Methods section of this report.

Findings from the action research were used to inform future service development and promote organisational learning. An evaluation of Connections' outcomes, and a reflection on organisational learning, are covered in the Findings section of this report. The discussion puts these findings in context of broader literature and explores implications for schools, workplaces, social service

providers and government. A diagrammatic overview of Connections (Figure 1, p. 9) provides more detail of the activities undertaken and the findings uncovered.

### 1.4 Innovative aspects

Although PSUSI is over 100 years old, the Connections approach in schools is considered quite innovative. It is not commonplace for social service or community agencies to regularly work through schools as part of parent support or community development initiatives. Often when agencies are working with schools, work is reactive to 'issues identified' for particular young people or families. Connections' interaction within the schools was based on proactively building relationships and relationship skills between various groups of people (for example, parents and the school, parents and young people), rather than responding to identified problems with particular young people or families. By strengthening broader relationships, the service aimed to prevent issues from arising or escalating. This was a major shift away from traditional case-based work, or one-on-one counselling with specific clients, where first contact with clients is generally reactive, once issues have already arisen. Such traditional work is of course still immensely valuable for supporting families, but it is not all that families need. Connections often provided a pathway for families to access further in-depth support if they required it.

Connections improved schools' access to an 'outside' worker dedicated to promoting positive parent-school relationships and facilitating action-based research around this.

The Connections school newsletter *What's The Buzz* facilitated information sharing between schools that would not have otherwise occurred. The information sharing was seen as beneficial by all the schools' principals, many of whom saw lack of information sharing as a barrier towards progress.

The Connections initiative also offered another way to try to effect workplace change – through working parents. The Family Leave workplace initiative had not been piloted elsewhere in New Zealand, and trialling it enabled families to tell their stories of what a family-friendly initiative in the workplace meant for them. The design of Family Leave is for maximum uptake, and differs from many other forms of flexible leave arrangements in that it tries to minimise potential



disadvantages to employees. There is no loss of income for taking Family Leave; time off can be taken in small increments and the time away does not have to be made up on a different occasion.

Previous New Zealand research was predominantly focused on work-life balance, rather than a specific focus on supporting families through workplaces, although there are significant overlaps. In addition, there is little previous research on how family-friendly

initiatives in the workplace can affect parental involvement and relationships in schools.

The Connections research deliberately added the voices of children and young people to the work-life, family relationships and schools debate. Previous research, particularly in the work-life arena, has focused on adult respondents. Incorporating the voices of young people adds another perspective to the debate and helps provide a clearer understanding of the big picture.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 Action research

This section of the report explains in more detail the service and research methods overviewed in Figure 1.

An action research approach underpins the service and research methods, with PSUSI undertaking cycles of action (activity) followed by research (feedback collation, evaluation) and reflection. This research and reflection in turn informed the service activity that followed. The PSUSI Connections worker carried out most of the Connections activity across the school and workplace streams, the PSUSI researcher conducted the research, and both people co-authored this report.

Action research lends itself to use in community situations (Dick, 2009). It is an appropriate approach when practitioners are trying to bring about desired social change, whilst at the same time gaining a deeper understanding of the complex social and environmental issues affecting such change. Achieving social change or social justice goals motivates many social service agencies, and the action research method allows for this. It also encourages practitioners to reflect upon and learn from their work.

One advantage of using an action research method is that it encourages workers and researchers to build close relationships with people within the system being studied, rather than distancing themselves. This is essential because the whole purpose of the service is building relationships. The Connections worker's close relationships with parents enabled her to become part of their support network when necessary. It also gave much insight into the lives of parents and school communities. These insights were recorded in case notes, providing an in-depth source of information gathered through sustained contact with participants and immersion in school settings. This complemented the more traditional one-off methods of gathering information using participant evaluation surveys, interviews and focus groups.

Action research is by nature exploratory, and enables a better understanding of factors affecting the service's aims, development and delivery. Because action research contains critical reflection, it enables service delivery to remain flexible and responsive to real and often complex social conditions. This makes it ideally

suited for social service providers, particularly when they are seeking to implement innovative services or trial new ideas. This is because theoretical service models are based on assumptions about how things will work. These assumptions do not always prove correct in reality. By recognising this, responding accordingly and coming up with revised plans, services can adjust to better fit reality. As Dick states, "the virtue of action research is its responsiveness". This increases the likelihood of service effectiveness (Dick, 2009, p. 8).

There are limitations to taking an action research approach. One of these is the potential for bias when those reviewing the findings are those who are delivering the service. Using a researcher not associated with service delivery, to help analyse the findings, minimised the potential for bias. However, the researcher was still part of the organisation that was delivering the service, which could make objectivity more difficult. At times, there was tension between service needs and research needs. In particular, the need to build collaborative relationships was constantly balanced with the need to collect and interpret information. This was particularly evident in the collection of pre- and post-intervention parent participation data.

Sometimes action research approaches are criticised for not seeking to control variables, or achieve standardisation across the research. However, controlling variables is extremely difficult when dealing with complex social realities. In addition, Connections worked across five sometimes vastly different schools. In these instances, standardising activity or research methods may have compromised the project. For example, there's not much point trying to support parents to have time off work if they aren't actually working, and conducting a survey of all school parents is likely to be problematic when the parents speak a variety of different languages, or may have literacy issues. Similarly, events that draw parents in to one school may spark little interest in another school.

In order to increase the rigor and reliability of the research a number of different tools and techniques were used. These included:

- > using a variety of different methods to collect the research outlined in the Research Methods section of the report

- > using a variety of different groups of people as sources of information; for example, parents, young people, principals, the Connections worker and the researcher
- > using a mix of open- and closed-ended responses in surveys enabling some results to be calculated quantitatively, and not potentially be subject to interpretative bias of qualitative responses
- > collecting information during the course of the research, and using this to help formulate later research questions
- > asking a number of different questions which address the same topic
- > conducting parents' focus groups in more than one school, and speaking with principals in all schools
- > having two people analyse the parents' focus groups and principals' interviews, and only reporting mutually agreed themes.

## 2.2 Mapping the action research cycle

Originally, the plan for Connections was to broker time off work for parents to attend school activity. It was assumed that working parents, accessed through schools, would enrol in the Connections service. Parents would then allow the Connections worker to contact their employers and arrange for them to have time off work to be involved in their children's schools. It was further assumed that some employers would be keen to take up the scheme.

Service activity took place – pamphlets about the service were distributed to principals and placed in school reception areas. Additionally, the service was advertised in three of the schools' newsletters. Despite this publicity, no parents enrolled in the service. So the Connections worker decided to build relationships with parents through existing groups.

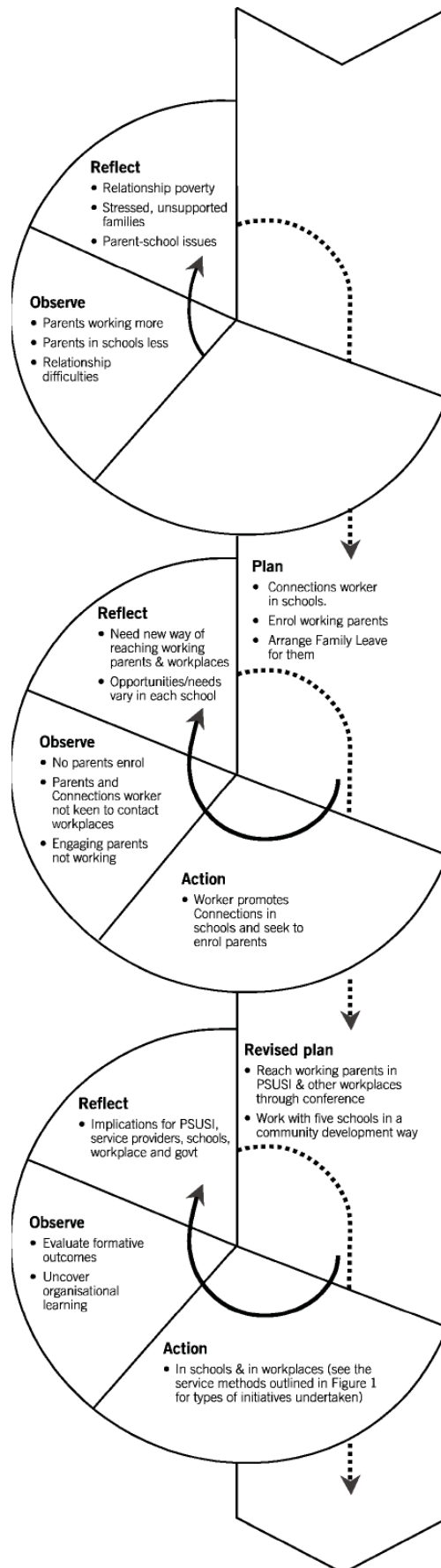
She then asked these parents what would support their involvement with the school. It was apparent that many of these parents were not working. Conversations with the parents who were working indicated parents felt uncomfortable about an outside organisation approaching their employer and requesting unpaid leave for them. This was in line with DOL research, which indicated that most people were reluctant to approach employers to make requests (UMR Research, 2003).

In addition, the Connections worker felt this was not an empowering model for employer/employee relationships. She felt working with employers in a more generalised way, by providing them with knowledge and tools, could help address these concerns, along with being more efficient and effective. On reflection, employers might feel able to give some employees time off but not others. However, getting extra time off for all employees with children at school might require a reasonably significant commitment from an employer. The Connections worker felt such institutional change would be difficult for PSUSI to achieve.

As depicted in Figure 2, many assumptions of the intended service model were not met.<sup>1</sup> Parents did not enrol in the service and they did not want Connections to contact their employers. Many parents who ultimately engaged with Connections in its revised form were not working, and were already somewhat involved with the school. Consequently a new way had to be found of accessing working parents. Intuitively, these parents could be accessed through workplaces. So Connections mutated into having two distinct streams – supporting families through schools and supporting families through workplaces. The services delivered through each of the streams are described in the Service Methods section that follows.

<sup>1</sup> Figure 2 is based on the simple Action Research Model from MacLissac (1995) as outlined in O'Brien (2001).

**FIGURE 2: The connections action research cycle**



## 2.3 Supporting families through schools: Schools service methods

Five Christchurch schools participated in the Connections project. In this report they are given the pseudonyms Tahī, Rua, Toru, Wha and Rima.

The Connections worker adopted a community development approach to working within schools. This meant being responsive to each community, empowering each community to explore their ideas and feel ownership over initiatives undertaken. The Connections worker notes, “It is always important, and particularly important in small groups, that the group belongs to the parents and school. I’m mindful that my role on these committees needs to remain insignificant in many ways. A part of the group, yet not the chairperson or secretary! Un-relied upon, if you like.”

The Connections worker’s exact involvement differed in each school. Each ‘service’ response was in no way predetermined, but designed to meet the needs and desires of each school community. This evolved from asking principals and parents what would help build relationships and support families. Despite differences, there were similarities between some service responses, enabling them to be broadly classified into types of school initiatives. These increased the opportunities for parents to interact with their children, other parents, families and family as well as the school. Each type of service method (school initiative) is described below, and an overview of methods used in each school is provided in Table 1.

### 2.3.1 PTA

Four of the primary school principals asked for assistance with their fundraising groups. These are often referred to as PTAs, though none were members of the New Zealand Parent Teacher Association. The principals valued the monetary support that PTAs offered. One principal wanted a PTA established within the school; while three were concerned their PTAs had decreasing levels of parental involvement and might be disbanding. One principal wanted the PTA to be more involved in school life as a whole, rather than focus on fundraising. This principal considered and utilised ideas discussed with the Connections worker in order to continue and strengthen the PTA. Once the focus was removed from fundraising, and onto fun, members of the PTA increased, as did the amount of money raised. This school now reports a strong and lively PTA.

The Connections worker became involved with the PTAs and helped out in various ways; from organising events through to helping out at a sausage sizzle. She also supported parents to create a small PTA group in one school without one.

### 2.3.2 Groups

Three of the schools had groups designed to support parents and foster parental relationships both with the school, and with other parents. Most groups took the form of regular meetings of a small number of core parents, who met to chat and develop friendships with each other, or take part in aspects of school life. Some of the groups were facing issues with ongoing continuity, organisation, resourcing or membership. One school principal asked the Connections worker to facilitate one of these groups; a pre-school programme run within the school. In another school, a parent network group welcomed the Connections worker’s support. In yet another school there was regular, quite informal coffee and chat mornings for parents. These were organised by the principal, with parental input as to what they wanted to cover.

The Connections worker became involved with these groups, as a way of immersing herself in the community and building relationships with parents. What she did in each group differed according to group needs and wishes. In some groups the Connections worker simply became a member of the group and did things like helping decorate the hall for a school disco or serving tea and coffee at a parent evening. This approach helped break down barriers, and was part of a continuing process of acceptance as part of the school community. As the worker became known within the routine or normal activity of the groups, and was seen to be trustworthy and reliable, people started asking questions about the Connections initiative and discussion about ideas to engage more parents began.

In some groups, the Connections worker sought to attract new members to the groups through circulating information, doing research and phoning parents. In conjunction with the group, she put together programmes or activities for the group to do. She organised guest speakers, chosen by the groups to come and talk, and helped the groups out with funding or resources. She was always available for the members of the group to talk to, to provide a listening ear and at times, give advice.

### 2.3.3 Courses

The Connections worker helped facilitate five courses in three schools. Courses, as opposed to groups, had an envisaged end date. Courses were for young people (generally students), parents or both. Two of the courses were pre-existing programmes, facilitated by PSUSI counsellors; the other courses evolved in response to the school community. Courses covered a wide range of topics and formats, and all courses were designed to be interactive and fun.

The courses for young people included a social skills programme for people referred by school teachers, a resiliency course for all Year 6 students aimed at helping build young people's self-esteem and friendships and a drama and improvisation course aimed at helping develop social skills offered to all Year 6 students. Therefore, for two of these three courses, taking part was a school expectation allowing PSUSI to access many students.

A parenting skills and strategies course evolved from one of the parent support groups, and another course (Safe) was developed for parents and young people to attend together. Despite the variation between courses, they all incorporated a focus on positive ways of communicating, relationship skills, building on existing strengths and encouraging group participants to support each other.

In setting up the courses for young people, Connections found ways to meet and involve parents. For example, before courses started the facilitators phoned the young person's parents and met with them to establish common goals for the young people. This meeting usually occurred in the family's home. During the course parents were phoned again and updated by the facilitators. They were encouraged to become involved where possible. As part of the resiliency course, parents attended a 'buddy day' session and the young person's graduation; as part of the creative drama course parents attended a group performance.

### 2.3.4 Family school events

The Connections worker helped contribute to family school events in four schools. Again the exact events were determined by the community. Tahi School had a multilingual fono<sup>2</sup> and grandparents day, Rua held a fish and chip night and community day, Toru

had a disco and classroom get-togethers, while Wha organised a guest speaker from the Brainwave Trust to talk to parents and staff about child development. The events gave parents the opportunity to connect with other parents and to speak with staff. In the case of the multilingual fono, translators were present, and questions prompted parents to explore what they wanted for their child's future. They were also asked for ideas of how they could work with the school to help achieve their goals.

### 2.3.5 Tailor-made family support

At times, when parents or young people discussed concerns with the Connections worker, she provided more specific advice or tailor-made help. This was in the form of social work support, though she was not working as the primary agent or social worker. Normally the Connections worker would support the individual and/or family until another lead agency can become involved. In the past this has seen the Connections worker referring individuals and/or families to social workers in schools, individual or youth and family counselling, a family psychologist, health services, Work and Income or other agencies.

In addition, the Connections worker provided mentoring for one young person, and emotional support for others to make contact with services such as Women's Refuge and Child, Youth and Family. In most circumstances, the social work support was a short-term measure for the Connections worker until a referral was taken up by another agency. This was always done via personal introduction by the Connections worker. The most common short-term social work was obtaining and delivering food parcels, and during December, Christmas gifts for families.

### 2.3.6 Special projects

Special projects evolved from some of the community conversations initiated by Connections. Some parents spoke of school being a comfortable and familiar place and suggested the school could become a hub, offering access to other services and community organisations. It was felt community agencies could also benefit from offering appointments, programmes and services from the school base. Alongside the community, the Connections worker began undertaking research surrounding this idea for two of the school communities.

---

<sup>2</sup> In this context fono refers to a community meeting or gathering to discuss topics which the people attending have in common.



Another special project evolved from the Rua School survey research. The survey responses led to a database being developed about parental preferences. The survey questionnaire asked parents to identify a range of skills they could utilise to help the school, their availability to help and preferred ways of school contact. The resulting database enabled the school to identify potential parent helpers for particular tasks, and issue personalised invitations.

A third special project involved research with students and was commissioned by the school to help them understand student experiences at their school. The school was particularly interested in students' experiences of bullying, and how they could make a difference in this area.

### 2.3.7 Across-school communication

Many principals were keen to use Connections as a catalyst for ideas. In order to facilitate the cross-pollination of ideas between schools, Connections began issuing *What's The Buzz*. This was a newsletter of tips and ideas on different ways to involve and engage with school families. Many of the tips and ideas emanated from the schools Connections worked in. The newsletter was distributed bi-monthly to principals and staff of schools involved with Connections.

## 2.4 Schools: Research methods

As the Connections school service initiative changed, research methods adapted. In response, research was designed to complement the community adventures being undertaken through the two streams; supporting families through schools and supporting families through workplaces. Schools were keen to utilise Connections in a number of diverse ways, resulting in a broad range of activity. This necessitated a variety of research methods. These are described below and an overview of research tools used in each school provided in Table 4.

### 2.4.1 School parent survey

In Rua School, parent views were sought through a self-completed survey. Parents were asked about parental involvement, and how they would like to be involved with the school. The survey was developed in conjunction with the school principal and the Parent

Network Group, and served as a vehicle for asking other parents if they would like to join the group.

A copy of the questionnaire can be found at Appendix 1.

### 2.4.2 Participant evaluations

Most participants completed participant evaluations after courses, but evaluations were also completed after some events (such as the multilingual fono). Participant evaluations provided a mix of quantitative and qualitative data focused on how participants had experienced the activity, and what difference it had made to their lives. For two of the courses, the creative drama course and the Safe course, pre- and post-course information was collected and responses compared. All other participant evaluations asked individuals to assess or describe the impact of the courses or events.

In the case of the multilingual fono, translators from within the parent community collected this information (an example questionnaire at Appendix 2a). For other courses, surveys were circulated and collected by the course coordinator. Most information was collected anonymously; providing a name was optional. Group members also completed participant evaluations, known in-house as service evaluations. This information was collected six monthly, with surveys circulated to all present on the day. Example questionnaires can be found at Appendices 2b and 2c. Throughout this report, those completing these evaluations are referred to as parent group respondents.

### 2.4.3 Parent focus groups

Parents' focus groups were held in Tahī and Rua Schools, and attended by four Pre-school Group members, and five Parent Network Group members respectively. Focus groups were approximately an hour long, and conducted during the time that the group normally met. The focus groups generated rich qualitative data. Focus group questions can be found at Appendix 3.

### 2.4.4 Principal interviews

All of the principals from participating schools took part in semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one hour. Questions asked during interviews with principals can be found at Appendix 4.

### 2.4.5 Young people interviews

Young people in Rua School were interviewed about their experiences of school and how parental involvement impacted on them. Questions were developed in conjunction with the school principal and parent group, incorporating a focus on bullying. Questions asked are contained at Appendix 5.

### 2.4.6 Case notes

The Connections worker recorded case notes for each activity conducted within schools. These notes included data on the number of parents attending activities, the number of new attendees to groups and her recordings and reflections on group activities. They also included reflections on courses and mini-analyses of research conducted by the Connections worker, such as information from children's interviews.

### 2.4.7 Researcher's case notes

These provided the researcher's considerations on the Connections programme and the research surrounding it. They also included mini-analyses of data gathered during the Connections programme such as feedback from the Rua School survey and the Safe course evaluation.

### 2.4.8 Information analysis

The principals' interviews and parents' focus groups were recorded, transcribed and coded by the researcher and the Connections worker. They were analysed thematically, and only mutually agreed upon themes are reported.

Most participant evaluations and surveys contained a mix of tick box response options and open-ended questions. Information from tick box responses was analysed quantitatively.

Qualitative information gained from surveys was generally brief.

## 2.5 Schools: Scope of participation

Table 1 shows the service initiatives undertaken in each school, along with the number of people taking part in each initiative (represented by N=). It also shows the research tools used in each school, the number or research respondents (again represented by N=) and the response rate (represented by R=). When participant evaluations have been added from more than one initiative, the average response rate is given.

**TABLE 1: School service and research initiatives**

School	School initiatives							Research tools					
	PTA (average number per session)	Groups (average number per session)	Courses	Family school events	Special projects	Tailor-made support for families	Newsletter	Parent participation data	Parents' focus groups	Principals' interviews	School parent survey	young people interviews	Participant evaluations
<b>Tahi</b>	N=12	N=8	N=58	N=77	✓	N=10	✓	✓	N=4 R=100%	✓			N=76 R=56%
<b>Rua</b>	N=4	N=5	N=30	N=160	✓	N=6	✓	✓	N=5 R=100%	✓	N=38 R=90%	N=40	N=20 R=38%
<b>Toru</b>	N=8	N=8	N=24	N=83		N=2	✓	✓		✓			✓
<b>Wha</b>	N=12			N=45			✓	✓		✓			
<b>Rima</b>							✓			✓			

## 2.6 Supporting families through workplaces: Service methods

No parents enrolled in the Connections service as initially conceived, so contact with employers could not be initiated through parents. In order to meet its aim of strengthening relationships between employers and employees and Outcome Five (enhancing workers' work-life balance), Connections needed to find other ways of engaging with employers, and reaching working parents.

So PSUSI decided to implement Family Leave in its own workplace and to run a conference about life balance for other employers. The scope of the workplace stream by Connections was somewhat narrower relative to school initiatives, partially because PSUSI had fewer established relationships with employers.

### 2.6.1 Workplace initiative 1: Family Leave

PSUSI has at its core, a fundamental belief in the importance and value of families. Many of PSUSI's services, including Connections, aim to enable families to flourish and to function well. They seek to enhance relationships between family members and encourage meaning in people's lives, along with a sense of hope and optimism. During 2005, the organisation underwent a number of management changes that led it to articulate some core social justice goals, including promoting interdependence, social connection and the value of parenting. PSUSI's strategic direction also proposed the organisational culture should align with its aspirations for clients. It should seek to enhance connectedness, cohesion, capability and coping, creativity and hope and sustainability.

PSUSI should enable staff to support their own families, just as they seek to help other families. Management considered that, "Presbyterian Support should start at home. We need to be modelling the type of behaviour we want others to adopt. Being more family-friendly will enable us to support our own staff and contribute to strong families and communities. It will also enable us to evaluate the benefits, and demonstrate these to other employers." So PSUSI embraced the initiative it wanted other organisation's to consider ie Family Leave.

PSUSI Family Leave offers staff an additional 20 hours paid leave per year, to be with their family in whatever

capacity they choose. Family is broadly defined to include an employee's extended family and those they have special close relationships with. Family Leave recognises the diversity of family forms in New Zealand, and that families are important at all stages of our life. It is not just available to parents caring for dependent children, but to everyone. It is underpinned by a belief in the fundamental importance of relationships, and the notion that everyone has family that they like to spend time with. At its heart is promoting 'together time'. The time off can be taken in any time increments, enabling workers to take anything from an hour to two and a half consecutive days. The Family Leave system is permeated by a high degree of trust, and maximum flexibility. Family Leave is available to all PSUSI staff on a pro-rata basis, and applied for through usual channels.

### 2.6.2 Workplace initiative 2: 'It's About Time' conference

PSUSI wanted to further the adoption of family-friendly policies in more workplaces than just its own, but had no workplaces to connect with due to the lack of response from parents to the original idea of a brokerage service. PSUSI also had little history or institutional knowledge about working with employers. So in order to reach a more general audience of employers the organisation decided to hold a conference. This was held in conjunction with the EEO Trust, which has a history of working with employers to promote flexibility and diversity in the workplace. Working with the Trust allowed PSUSI to access their organisational expertise and knowledge of the area. It also helped give the conference credibility. In a similar vein, other keynote speakers at the conference included Peter Townsend (CEO of the Canterbury Employers' Chamber of Commerce) and Ruth Dyson (then Minister of Social Development). The conference aimed to raise employers' knowledge and support for family-friendly initiatives in the workplace. It aimed to further the adoption of family-friendly initiatives in the workplace. It also sought to find out which incentives would help motivate employers to adopt family-friendly policies, and give employers further tools to take actions that support families and life balance.

## 2.7 Workplaces: Research methods

Each of the workplace initiatives was researched by comparing pre- and post-intervention data gathered through surveys and using case notes.

### 2.7.1 Family Leave surveys

All PSUSI staff were sent pre-and post-Family Leave surveys. These self-completed questionnaires contained a mix of open-ended and multiple-choice questions. This is an appropriate method for gathering information from members of an organisation, particularly when they have an interest in the topic (Dillman, 2000). The pre-Family Leave survey (found at Appendix 6a) was sent out one week prior to the policy's official approval, and was responded to by 117 of 308 staff, a response rate of 38 percent. The survey gathered baseline data regarding people's work-life balance, and how often work commitments interfered with people's family commitments. It also asked respondents to share what missing out on family experiences due to work commitments meant for them and their families, and what family-friendly initiatives they would like to see within PSUSI.

The post-Family Leave survey (found at Appendix 6b) was sent to 295 staff, resulting in 143 replies – a response rate of 48 percent. Some questions from the pre-Family Leave survey were repeated in the post-Family Leave survey, enabling responses to be compared to ascertain what difference Family Leave had made. In addition to this, the post-Family Leave survey gathered a variety of information about Family Leave usage and outcomes, to see if Family Leave was an effective way of supporting families. It also asked staff what Family Leave had meant for them and their families. Some staff shared comments made by their family members and some staff members' children

drew pictures depicting what Family Leave had meant for them.

### 2.7.2 Conference surveys

Conference participants were asked to fill out pre-and post-conference surveys (questionnaires found at Appendices 7a and 7b). Thirty-nine attendees submitted pre-conference surveys immediately after the CEO opened the conference, and 23 attendees submitted post-conference surveys immediately upon completion of the conference. Nineteen of 47 attendees submitted both pre-and post-conference data, a response rate of 40 percent. A paired samples T-test was used to ascertain whether there were significant changes in respondents' knowledge of, and attitudes towards, family-friendly initiatives.<sup>3</sup> Descriptive statistics from post-conference data were used to describe propensities towards action, and levels of support for how different mechanisms and incentives could influence the uptake of family-friendly initiatives.

Additionally, a follow-up Action Implementation survey was distributed via email to conference attendees, six weeks after the conference (Appendix 7c). Two respondents completed this.

### 2.7.3 Case notes

Both the researcher's and Connections worker's case notes were used to reflect upon services and impacts.

## 2.8 Workplaces: Scope of participation

Table 2 shows the workplace service initiatives undertaken, along with the number of people taking part in each initiative (represented by N=). It also shows the research tools used, the number or research respondents (again represented by N=) and the response rate (represented by R=).

**TABLE 2: Workplace service and research initiatives**

	Workplace initiative	Research tools	Results
PSUSI	Family Leave N=308	Pre-survey	N=117: R=38%
		Post-survey	N=143: R=48%
Other workplaces	Conference N=47	Pre-and post-surveys	Pre - N=39: R=83 % Post - N=23: R=49% Both pre and post N=19: R=40%
		Follow-up action survey	N=2: R=4%

<sup>3</sup> A paired samples T-test was used to compare the scores of participants who submitted both pre- and post-conference surveys. These participants answered the same questions before and after the intervention (conference attendance). The paired samples T-test was used to determine if the conference had made a significant difference (ie, a difference that could not be attributed to chance) to participant scores.

### 3. FINDINGS

This section of the report examines outcomes and organisational learning that resulted from Connections activity conducted through the schools and workplaces streams. Investigating Connections’ findings against outcomes enables an assessment of the extent to which it achieved its aim of supporting families through the strengthening of relationships. Organisational learning for PSUSI explores other unanticipated impacts and learnings that could effect future service delivery goals and operations. Limitations for the service delivery and research methods, are mentioned for each stream.

#### 3.1 Supporting families through schools

##### 3.1.1 Schools: Background and context

Initially the Connections worker approached five Christchurch primary schools (of deciles 3 to 6) asking if they would like to have involvement with

the Connections initiative. PSUSI had existing relationships with three of these schools through its Family Works services, and all five schools agreed to being involved with Connections. One principal stated, “Many other organisations come here to discuss problems, the Connections direction is positive and I found it invigorating and thought-provoking.”

The Connections worker worked with the principals to determine what each school was already doing to engage with parents, and what they saw as key areas the Connections worker could support.

The five primary schools ranged in decile, size and mix of students. The chart below gives an idea of the diversity of the schools. The information provided here is taken from the Education Counts website during 2006 (Education Counts website, 2008).

The following Connections’ findings contain an analysis of all the research information gathered through the schools stream: ie, Connections worker’s case

**TABLE 3: The diversity of schools taking part**

School	Gender		Number of students		Ethnic mix	Decile	Number of teachers
	Girls	Boys	NZ	Intl			
<b>Tahi</b>	60%	40%	101	3	53% Pākehā 14% Māori 6% Samoan 2% Cook Island 21% Afghani 2% Egyptian 3% Russian	3	Not recorded
<b>Rua</b>	33%	67%	67		71% Pākehā 25% Māori 3% Samoan	3	3.7
<b>Toru</b>	Co-ed, gender specifics not recorded		231		Not recorded	3	Not recorded
<b>Wha</b>	44%	56%	231		51% Pākehā 3% Māori 2% Pacific 15% Korean 9% Other Asian 9% European 11% Other	6	11
<b>Rima</b>	47%	53%	176		86% Pākehā 10% Māori 2% Cook Island 2% Asian	6	10

\* Note regarding % not totalling 100 because of rounding. (See Tahi & Rua)

notes, parent participation data, parent focus groups, principals' interviews, student surveys and interviews, a whole-school survey and a number of participant evaluations completed by group or course participants. These methods were to evaluate the impact of Connections, and examine factors which affect supporting families through schools.

### 3.1.2 Schools: Outcomes

#### Outcome 1: Increased parent participation in schools

Connections contributed towards increasing parent participation in school by:

- > contributing to events, groups and courses that provide parents with a chance to participate in school life (with or without family members)
- > encouraging school staff and existing groups to focus on involving parents.

Connections aimed to evaluate its impact on parents' school involvement through comparative parent participation data. Schools kept a log of the hours parents spent with the school, either watching or taking part in activities. However, collecting accurate parent participation data was quite a challenge for the schools, adding another administrative task to their day. In most instances, the data collected are best seen as indicative rather than an accurate count. Connections was aware of parental participation not reported in the data, and data collected in a particular way one year, but in a different way the next year. This made comparing years difficult. One school that did produce consistent data showed an increase from 141 hours of parent involvement in Term One of 2007, to 223 hours of parent involvement in Term Four of 2007.

To further examine the impact of Connections on parent participation, numbers of parents attending groups were gleaned from the Connections worker's case notes. These showed a general, but small, increase in both the number of group members, and new parents getting involved. It appeared initial activity helped groups gain traction and momentum that led to an increase in the number of parents participating. Continuing activity generally helped the groups maintain sustainability. In addition a number of new groups or events evolved, meaning parents had more opportunities to connect with the school. As one parent said, "Yeah there hasn't been a parent group here for a long, long time."

#### Outcome 2: Increased family time

Evidence suggests Connections made it more possible for parents to spend time with their children. This was achieved through:

- > facilitating courses that purposely seek parental involvement in particular activities
- > facilitating courses for families rather than individuals
- > contributing towards school events for families and family.

For many years PSUSI ran courses for young people. Sometimes separate courses were run for parents. However, since the inception of Connections' broader focus upon families, courses for young people now incorporate making contact and building relationships with the young people's parents. Parents are encouraged to join in aspects of the course; for example, buddy days, group outings or performances. During one course, young people cooked and invited their family/whānau to share the food. They offered the remaining food to other parents in the community as they collected their children at 3.00 pm. Parents involved in the course said, "The buddy day was good, spending time with my child 1 on 1." Even parents not directly involved noticed their children wanted to talk to them about it. They said the course meant "Talking and laughing more on the phone. They [my children] would ring me up more to talk about it."

In addition, other courses evolved specifically for families rather than individuals, where all sessions involve parents and young people attending and interacting together.

The Connections worker also contributed towards events aimed at giving families the opportunity of spending time together, such as a community day and fish and chip night. Parental feedback on such events was very positive. One parent commented, "The community day was really great because we were spending time with the children doing good things, giving them quality time." Parents said that some of these events "wouldn't have got off the ground" if it wasn't for the Connections worker. As some parents noted, "We haven't done that kind of thing [a fish and chip night in the school] for years and years. It's like bringing back stuff that we used to do here years ago and it sort of went on hold."



Another PSUSI family worker organised two classroom get-togethers in Toru School for parents and children to mix within classes. These were well attended, particularly in the middle school (Years 3 and 4) where 97 percent of parents attended. Parents and young people enjoyed the classroom get-togethers, and due to their success, these events will be offered in all classes next year.

**Outcome 3: Strengthened family relationships**

Feedback suggests that Connections groups, courses and events have strengthened family bonds and helped family members develop relationship skills through:

- > promoting quality time together
- > building the relationship skills of individual family members (including parenting skills and parental role modelling for parents)
- > facilitating conversations and communication between family members.
- > strengthening the support networks of individual family members
- > providing information and other tailor-made support for families when necessary

Connections events or activities often included families, rather than parents or children individually. Parents appreciated sharing this quality time with their children. They relay “having fun together” as a part of community days, school twilight events, school programmes which include parents and parent-classroom get-togethers. Similarly, a parent says, “Taking part in the activities with the children is one of the best things about being part of the pre-school group”.

Parents talked about the importance of spending quality time with their children, and being there to share the fun, witness their achievements and celebrate their successes. They noticed that “the kids love it when you’re involved at school and at the odd time you can’t come they don’t like it”. One parent voiced, “[My child] likes me helping out with a group, and it shows them that you care”.

Young people’s comments back this up. They really liked it when their parents were involved in their school life. Their comments indicate that parental involvement in schools enhances family bonding:

I think it’s great that my parents come in here to see me and my sisters. It’s good for me. It makes me feel good.

It makes me feel happy inside, and I know that my mum knows I do well at school so that she’s right beside me when I do things.

My parents come to assemblies and with cross country. It cheers me up. Makes me more confident to run.

When they do come I reckon it’s like cool ‘cause she can see me get my certificates and things like that and enjoy the moment with me and be happy and stuff and impressed with me.

Being part of the school also allows parents to know what’s happening for their child more, providing information about their child and opening opportunities for sharing:

We know more about their everyday life. A lot of parents don’t know what their kids are up to or what’s going on.

It’s more the talking issue [when you’re involved with school], you know discussing things with them.

I think they [children] like us [parents] being in the school because when you go to assembly or whatever they say ‘Oh did you see that Mum?’ Or at sports day, ‘Did you see that?’ Or ‘Can I show you my story?’

In order to further encourage positive family interaction Connections designed courses for families to attend together, such as the Safe course that facilitated discussion on emotional and physical safety. Sessions covered a variety of topics, but all were facilitated with the goal of strengthening family relationships through developing understanding, and promoting further conversations. Pre- and post-course participant evaluations showed parents’ and young people’s knowledge increased about every area covered in the course. After the course a number of adults felt they could support their young people better over a range of matters. Many adults and young people reported family communication had improved as a result of the course. Adults reported a significant increase in how much they had talked with their children about issues. Young people reported a significant increase in how comfortable they felt when talking with their parents about such things. In addition, qualitative comments illustrated parent-child relationships were strengthened through the course.

Adults said the course helped them:

- > with bonding and time to talk
- > achieve a better relationship with their child
- > see things from their child's perspective, and hopefully the child saw things from theirs
- > communicate better with their children
- > gain confidence in parenting.

Other comments included "It was great to spend time in topical discussion with my child", and "This course helped us [myself and my child] to learn to talk to each other and open up more."

Young peoples' comments were similar, saying they learnt:

- > to talk to each other
- > how to handle bullying
- > how to understand relationships for others
- > to have confidence talking to others about uncomfortable subjects
- > how to keep safe in lots of different forms.

Other Connections groups and courses also regularly focused on skills building for individual family members. For example, communication skills were developed in a creative drama course for young people, parenting skills sessions were held as part of a parent group and the pre-school group involved social skills development for toddlers.

Young people attending the creative drama course completed pre- and post-participant evaluations. These showed that after the course there was an increase in the proportion of young people who said they almost always: listen to other people; understand how other people feel; understand that other people are different to them; feel okay about talking in front of other people; and feel good about themselves. Equipping young people with these skills can benefit family relationships.

Parents participating in various groups said Connections' initiatives helped their family relationships. All parent group respondents said that being part of the group helped strengthen their relationship/s with their child or children. In focus groups, parents' comments included:

It [the Connections initiative] has helped our relationships with our children for sure.

Because it's like part of the burden ... a weight gone off my shoulders.

Parents said they picked up parenting skills and new ideas from belonging to the groups. These new ideas sometimes came from other parents, the Connections worker or other social service providers they had contact with through Connections:

I think you're always picking up new ideas when you're together with other parents. You realise your child's not the only toerag on the planet.

Being part of the group has helped give me ideas on all sorts of things.

It's a very relaxed way to talk about and help deal with family issues.

We were going through a patch of bratty kids and so the Connections worker suggested bringing a parenting skills facilitator in. Almost like doing a parenting course, but again being very flexible and whatever issues arise or crop up the parenting skills facilitator was really good with that as well.

We dealt with dealing with siblings, different behavioural issues, just different techniques and stuff. A number of different issues cropped up and we spent time on whatever they were.

When more in-depth support was necessary to help family relationships, this was provided:

I was having issues with my middle son, and now we've managed to get him into counselling, which is really helpful because, with the issues he was dealing with, there was nothing out there for him. And now he's actually seeing the counsellor outside of school of course, and it's really helped him a lot and it seems to be getting somewhere now which is nice, which is really nice.

Principals also felt the Connections worker helped support families:

I can direct people to the Connections worker, and she helps with structures for families. She's developing infrastructures, and deals with my most vulnerable parents which takes a great burden off my shoulders. They [the parents] gravitate to her ... and if we can stop any crisis at the pass with [parent] groups or whatever, then that's an invaluable resource to the school.

She's another pair of hands bridging the gaps between school and community – another liaison and support structure for families. She's a neutral support role...

#### Outcome 4: Strengthened parent-school relationships

Connections strengthened relationships between parents and schools by:

- > increasing opportunities for parent-school interaction
- > creating an opportunity for joint parent-school goal setting
- > promoting the benefits of parental involvement to schools and parents alike.

Connections contributed to a number of events aimed at fostering parent-school relationships.

In Tahi School, a multilingual fono was organised to help schools and parents jointly consider what they want for each child's future, and how they could work together to create this future.

Farsi, English, Malay and Samoan translators were at the meeting to facilitate communication. In addition, food was provided, and a supervised movie night was simultaneously put on for the children. Goody bags of parenting information, again in the languages used by families where possible, and spot prizes were also part of the night.

A total of 37 people attended, representing one-third of the school families. Participant evaluations show the fono enhanced parent-school relationships. All parent respondents felt the fono helped their relationship with the school. All said they talked about how they could be involved with their child's schooling, and got to know people associated with the school better. Most parent respondents felt they worked out some shared goals with the school, and all felt more comfortable coming to school and talking to people who work in the school as a result of the fono. Some parents felt ongoing meetings would be helpful and from here the school began implementing the Home-School Partnership, a Ministry of Education initiative involving parents that supports literacy and numeracy learning for children.

The Connections worker's case notes state:

These people [parents and caregivers] are really keen to be involved. I had lots of people approach me afterwards and say what a great meeting it was. Some got up and spoke saying this meeting and working together like this can't be a 'one off'. There was also some pertinent learning. At one stage the interpreter clarified with me why it's important that parents are involved in their children's schooling. I said that in New Zealand, positive

academic outcomes for kids are much better when their parents are involved with their school and schooling. This was interpreted, some conversation emerged between the parents, then the interpreter asked if the parents could still help even though they were illiterate. I felt this kind of 'disclosure' was a bit of a breakthrough for us all.

Parent-school relationships have also been enhanced through groups associated with Connections. All parent group respondents said that being part of their group had helped strengthen their relationship with the school. Interestingly, several parents spoke about the Connections initiative helping with school transitions, either when a child started school, or when families changed schools. They felt being part of the group helped them and their children gain information about the school, helped them become familiar with the school buildings and school staff. One parent said, "Originally a teacher was taking the group so we knew her. It was a teacher we got to know." Another said, "The group meant that when they [pre-schoolers] started school they already had friends, and they knew the buildings." Another said, "The school did a lot of talking about what the kids did and what the children need to have to come to school." Taking part in groups also helped parents fit in when they had shifted to a new school. "We missed the first term [after coming from another school]. So this [group] was really good."

Another way Connections helped strengthen parent-school relationships was by prompting schools to consider other ways they can engage with the parent community. After an initial Connections meeting one school principal said, "I started putting down on paper the ways we worked with families, then we conducted in a sense a bit of a review – how often we worked in those ways, how we tried to connect and how our resources were being utilised by the community as well, so it sort of led to a whole series of things I think."

Parent groups within the schools reported that they felt the school had become more community focused since the Connections initiative began within the school. This could be because groups have access to a wider range of community contacts through people coming together as a community within the school. It could be that nurturing parent-school and community relationships in this way contributed towards two schools considering the development of a community hub. Parents see all of these things as contributing to a more positive relationship with the school.

### Outcome 5: Enhanced families' support networks

Connections groups, courses and events enabled families to enhance their support networks by:

- > parents developing friendships with other parents
- > establishing a relationship with the Connections worker
- > linking families in with other organisations that can help.

Establishing friendships was an important part of the school-parent groups. For many parents the main purpose for going to the group was to connect with other parents. Most parent group respondents said that they had developed friendships as part of the group, and all said they felt comfortable talking to others as part of the group. They said being part of the group meant "friendships – someone else to chat to", "meeting other parents" and "getting to know other parents more". These friendships were an especially important focus of the Connections initiative as it became evident that people's connections to others in their community are vital to family wellbeing. Friendships appear to provide parents with a listening ear, a sense of hope, sense of worth and support. Parents report "parenting isn't always easy" and "it [parenting] can be very isolating". A common theme amongst parent group respondents was that belonging to the group helped reduce this sense of isolation and restore hope.

Parents made the following comments:

That's the reason I kept coming to the group. Just to have some 'normal' other adult to talk to.

Sometimes it's just knowing you're not going through stuff on your own. You know like someone else is going through exactly the same stuff.

We're all struggling with things, similar things.

We [parent and child] go to music groups and other groups, but you don't have time to sort of chat. So you don't get a chance to realise those things, like you're not on your own and that other people find it hard.

It's nice to know you're not the only one going through it.

The group's been great. I met [another parent].

A principal agreed, saying, "At the group parenting

issues are dealt with in an open forum and the parents realise they're not stupid, and they're not alone."

Connections also helped link families in with other social support when necessary.

The Connections worker's knowledge of broader networks enabled families greater access to them. It also provided a proactive approach before crises arise.

At times, and with group permission, the Connections worker introduced other community organisations or services to the whole group. For example, a Work and Income representative visited one group to talk about access to entitlements. In other instances, the Connections worker was able to offer more in-depth help or preventative social work. When one group asked for parenting tips and advice, the Connections worker asked if introducing a parenting skills facilitator would be helpful. The group agreed, but because of some specific support requests surrounding parenting children with ADHD (as an example), the parenting skills facilitator responded to the parents' specific questions, rather than rolling out a prescribed parenting programme. The parenting skills facilitator now joins the group intermittently in order that they can utilise this support. In addition, counselling support was arranged for some of the families. The Connections worker's role here is one of friendship and being able to weave in support when requested, or offering other types of support.

Parents responded:

I've been struggling with things which she's been pretty good and resourceful in getting me to, like get help in getting food grants and spoke to WINZ for me and that sort of thing, so she's been really good like that.

I think that she's managed to open a few doors to different people, obviously for different reasons was helpful, been really helpful. Otherwise, I think some of us would be struggling on our own and getting nowhere. At least with the Connections worker either having the resources or the contacts, it's been a lot easier for whatever respect. So that's been really helpful.

Parents' comments indicate the Connections worker established trusted relationships and there does not appear to be any embarrassment or discomfort about sharing their problems or asking for help. The

Connections worker became part of the parents' support network that could then link them in to other support when necessary. Parents said the following:

I feel if there's anything I want I could go and talk to [the Connections worker] about it.

If there was a problem that I had that I thought she would help me with, then before I went elsewhere I would go and get some help from her. So it's good to have someone, who's not part of the school, working in.

Whatever each individual need is, she's been really good.

She's a connection isn't she, like between things.

A principal spoke about the Connections worker's impact:

The Connections worker has made a huge difference. She supports parents, but she has a face – she's consistent, ongoing, here weekly, and has a personal touch. Vulnerable parents need people to listen, someone that cares about them and they know that she does. She's not just a title or name – she's real. She empowers them to do things themselves.

She breaks down barriers between people and government agencies like Work and Income. Sometimes she brings agencies to the schools and other times she directs families to the places. This is a great way to give people self-esteem.

#### Outcome 6: Cross-pollinated ideas between schools

Connections contributed to cross-pollinating ideas between schools through:

- > writing and circulating a newsletter, called *What's The Buzz* containing ideas and information about supporting families and parent-school relationships
- > the Connections worker's conversations with parents and principals.

Some schools utilised the Connections initiative to generate new ideas or hear about and implement ideas from other schools. Principals and parents both felt it was valuable to share ideas between schools but principals suggested some changes to the newsletter. These included online access, or a blog site which schools could use to share initiatives involving parents and family. Principals spoke about Connections as a catalyst for trying new ideas:

I've found this quite invigorating and thought-provoking and really quite rewarding because we shared some ideas and I went away and tried a few of them and they came off and other people have picked them up and carried them on.

She's like the outside looking in. In school, everyone is playing roles and they're coming from a particular perspective, [the Connections worker] is more objective ... she's able to bring in other ideas, points of view, other things she's been involved in and give feedback.

Just having [the Connections worker] there, as an ideas generator, that's better than what we had before, because if it's just us, you get stuck in patterns. It's easy to get tired and disillusioned.

Parents responded:

Sometimes I'll ask the Connections worker what they do in another school and she'll say 'Oh they do it like this', and you think that's a good idea. I think, as good as any school is, it's really good to get new ideas.

It's like having fresh eyes on the situation ... so you don't get stagnant and stuck ... and having those outside contacts as well was brilliant.

#### 3.1.3 Organisational learning

This section considers impacts and learnings that could effect future service delivery, goals and operations.

Families can be supported through schools in many ways. Parental involvement in schools can simultaneously strengthen relationships between family members, and parents and schools. It can also help parents to enhance their own social support networks. Getting involved in schools provides social service organisations with an opportunity to be part of families' social support networks. It is a great way of accessing families and proactively contributing towards the development of healthy relationships. It also offers social service organisations the opportunity to become a valuable resource to both schools and families, providing more in-depth or tailor-made support when needed.

#### Influencing factors for parental involvement

Throughout the research a number of factors were seen as influencing relationships with families. These are of relevance to schools and social service

organisations that seek to engage, and build relationships, with families.

### ***Range of opportunities***

Schools that offered a variety of different opportunities for parental involvement were more likely to see and engage with more, and different, parents. The *Connections* worker notes, “the more opportunities parents have to be involved with the school the more familiar and comfortable the school becomes to them”.

### ***Events***

Many school family events were well attended. Events seemed a particularly effective way of getting parents informally involved in the school, and breaking down parent-school barriers.

One parent spoke about attending a community event, held during the weekend at the school by saying, “I think it breaks down the barriers of the classroom, so it’s like school is okay and if it’s okay I can venture into the classroom, so I think that really helps parent-teacher relationships and parent-child relationships as well.” The *Connections* worker notes that events sometimes brought parents to the school that the principals hadn’t seen before.

### ***Groups***

Groups, although generally small, served an important purpose and were of immense support to some parents. However, other parents, particularly those with less time, were more likely to attend events.

A variety of parent groups could help foster parental involvement. Groups can be developed around times of children’s or parents’ transitions, such as children starting school, parents starting a new school and children moving on to intermediate. As well as building parent-school relationships such groups appear to help children and parents prepare for, or adjust to, new circumstances. Pre-school group parents responded:

They had a teacher taking it, so it was a teacher we got to know, and the children knew her.

The children got to know each other.

Yeah that was good and it meant when they started school they already had friends.

Groups could also be formed around common parental interests, helping out with similar tasks or simply around parents meeting each other. Common interests,

tasks, goals or courses could provide the opportunity for development of new groups.

Groups developed for a purpose can often become much more than that, and belonging can meet different needs for different people. Groups provided the opportunity for parents to meet and enhance their support networks. As one parent in the pre-school group said, “You guys [other parents] were coming to [the school group] to hear about school things, and I was coming ’cause I needed someone to talk to really.”

Groups don’t have to be large to be supportive of parents. Some parents really liked the intimacy that small groups offered. One said, “I think being a small group, everyone’s really open about things which works really well.” The *Connections* worker’s reflections note that, “it can’t be assumed that just because a group is small it doesn’t meet anyone’s needs. Maybe it’s about creating something else for other parents and this should be explored, or other times be made available.” Numbers attending groups can be reasonably fluid, and while numbers are down some weeks, they bounce back and increase on others. This shows that parents’ attendances sometimes vary according to their other commitments, and that temporary decreases in numbers should not be regarded as a lack of need, as numbers invariably increase again. It also shows the importance of measuring outcomes (the effectiveness of the services) rather than outputs (number of attendances). It is particularly encouraging, that a number of new parents continue to join groups and start an involvement with the school.

### ***Courses***

Providing social skills courses for young people through schools can help improve their communication and interacting skills, increasing the likelihood of respectful relationships with others. It can also help identify and foster young people’s strengths and build up their self-esteem. Courses for parents, or for young people and parents to attend together, can also be offered through the school.

When social service organisations deliver courses for young people they have an invaluable opportunity to initiate contact, and connect with the young person’s family. In addition, courses designed for attending together seemed particularly beneficial for strengthening family bonding and communication.



**Initiative-specific factors**

Events, groups and courses were particularly well attended if they are perceived to be fun. Findings showed that parents often wanted to attend events if their children were involved in the event.

Having kai or drink available was also popular, and helped to encourage informal mingling of parents and workers, or parents and other parents. One PSUSI worker speaks of providing coffees for parents as a means of “breaking down the barriers, allowing introductions and promoting conversations”.

Parents also appreciated being able to take their other children to events or groups, or having some childcare and entertainment provided for children at the event (such as during the Connections multilingual fono). During the Connections interview one school principal had a toy box in his room and was looking after a parent’s toddler, while the parent was busy within the school.

Some principals ran events outside normal working hours (for example from 6.00 pm to 8.00 pm) to make it easier for working parents to attend.

Another important aspect to any school initiatives is the financial cost.

Parents said:

Because doing things with the children costs money and everything else costs money and the way things are going up in price, like it’s either that or the groceries ... but the community day was really great because we were spending time with the children doing good things, giving them quality time and it didn’t have to cost any money.

Events help because you’re doing some things with your child that have no cost.

Not stressing about the cost [means] it was just totally easy doing it.

**School culture**

**> Within the school**

This study showed that to foster parental involvement in schools, parents need to feel welcome and comfortable within the school, as if they are valued and have something to contribute.

Principals said:

School culture is the most effective thing for supporting families.

It’s nice they [parents] feel they can come and talk to us about things.

You need to make them feel part of something.

Speaking with parents made it clear that schools’ approachability really facilitates parental involvement. Parents feel motivated to participate when they feel welcome. “It’s just the atmosphere. You always feel welcome here.”

It helped having an open-door policy, so parents could be involved when it suits them:

We’re quite involved. We just bowl in and out.

Yeah it’s an open-door policy. You just bowl down anytime you want and if you want to help out with classes or art or whatever you just go and do it anytime.

It helped when parents had a history of positive interaction with staff:

Whenever I’ve seen the principal there’s always been a good outcome.

It helped when schools genuinely appreciate the efforts parents make:

The school seems to really value parents.

They really do appreciate the parent help.

School newsletters can be seen as an extension of school culture, and some schools put very specific ‘thank you’ items in the newsletter. These were used not just to thank parents who turned up to events, or helped out at school, but to recognise other ways parents contributed to the school experience as well, for example, thanking parents who helped their children to wear costumes on book day. Some school newsletters contained contributions from students, parents and others in the broader community. One school newsletter even extended sympathy to a grieving family.

Many of the schools welcomed parents into the staff room on a regular basis, particularly parent helpers. This appeared to help parents feel like an important part of the school.

### > **Seeking parent feedback**

Parents taking part in Connections were largely positive about their relationships with school staff. However, some parents felt that complaining about a school teacher may affect the relationship between that school teacher and their child. Similarly, the Connections worker became aware of other parental discontent when parents withdrew their child from a school. They hadn't discussed their concern about feeling undervalued with the school, and the school didn't ask why they were withdrawing their child. This indicates there are concerns for some parents about whether they can effectively communicate with school staff, particularly surrounding any issues parents may have. Principals are aware of this, as shown in these comments:

It's important for teachers to view criticism in a positive way.

We need to consider the difference we make, and as teachers we are gifted because we have the power or ability to make life hell or make it the best experience. I want to be remembered for the good things I do, and that's what keeps me going. I want my children to be better than me.

Schools need to be aware that there are concerns for parents, and while principals have talked openly about professional development for staff surrounding children's learning outcomes, 'positive and approachable relationships' between teachers, parents and children are perhaps not as heavily emphasised.

### > **Other parents**

Parents also found it hard being involved in school life if they felt they didn't know other parents. The Connections worker's case notes contain numerous comments on the awkwardness and anxiety felt by some parents when entering existing groups at schools for the first time. Parents said that it sometimes felt that everyone else in the school knows each other and "it can be quite hard to break in". This was a barrier to their participation. Knowing someone appeared enormously reassuring, and it helped when existing members encouraged others to join.

Consequently the Connections worker often took the role of facilitating introductions. She also made personal approaches to parents herself. She made telephone calls, and met parents at their home, so that parents felt they knew her. As the Connections worker was a

part of the group, new parents were able to join feeling like they had already connected with someone.

She noticed that it was somehow reassuring for people to know that she would be there, and they knew her. Similarly, another PSUSI community worker reflects, "Being involved as a professional has enabled isolated adults and children to feel comfortable to attend and become involved, with a friendly face available, and a mandate to engage."

Parents also comment about their own experience of this approach:

[The facilitators] have been great and they have contributed to me making friends with other parents.

It has made it more comfortable for me to be more involved after meeting other parents.

### **Accessing parent communities**

Many principals talked about how important it was to 'know' their parents. Principals used a variety of different ways to get to know parents. Being visible around the school, particularly at school drop-off and pick-up times was important. One principal spoke of using road patrol as an opportunity to strike up conversations with parents.

School staff can help build relationships with parents by involving themselves in parent activities. Parents at Tahī pre-school group, for example, really valued staff attending the group from time to time. At Whā School, the principal and various staff representatives attended PTA meetings, and the principal reported to the PTA, similarly to the school board of trustees. This gave the PTA a broad insight into the school's focus and goals, and aided parent-school relationship building. In Toru School, the principal organised and attended coffee mornings set up for parents. Then parents had input into topics discussed at the mornings.

A good time for accessing parents can be around school drop-off or pick-up times. Coffee mornings, for example, can be organised to occur straight after dropping children at school. Rima School principal utilises from 2.30pm-3.30pm in order to encourage parents collecting their children from school to come in. One of the courses also utilised this time to run a 'community day' event. The young people attending the course prepared food together, then offered it to families coming in to the school, including those who were waiting in their cars.

Another good time to connect with parents can be straight after events that traditionally draw parents in, such as assemblies. Connections recently helped organise coffee mornings after assembly in Wha school. School staff also attend these parent coffee mornings whenever possible.

Some schools went outside their own grounds to build relationships with parents, rather than always expecting the families to enter the school. Rima School staff were made aware of children's involvement in sports outside school and were encouraged, when possible, to attend the games. The principal also occasionally dropped by to cheer the kids on. He says this provided a great opportunity for getting to know parents, while showing the child he's interested in their life. In the spirit of partnership, Rima School principal also found out about events people in the school community were attending by listening to students, parents and staff. He then made an effort to let others in the school community know about these events, and went to some of them (for example, Chinese New Year and other cultural functions) himself. He said, "I needed to go outside my comfort zone to go to some of their community things. It takes effort to be approachable; sometimes you need to go to them [the parents], not assume they will come to you." He felt this was particularly important when parents perceived there were power differentials between staff and parents. Getting involved in their communities was a good way of breaking down the us/them division.

### **Catering for cultural diversity**

Catering for the cultural diversity of the school community is an important part of providing parents with opportunities to be involved in school life. One principal states that although the school's PTA is strong and has many members "...[it] does tend to be mono-cultured, it doesn't fit other cultures somehow. It would be useful to try other ways to engage other ethnic groups and support their culture."

Many schools were seeking to foster relationships with parents from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds. Culturally diverse communities have a lot to offer their schools in terms of knowledge and supporting other families from similar ethnic backgrounds. In Tahī School, the Connections worker contributed towards a Samoan celebration day, hosted by the Samoan school community. The Connections worker's case notes state, "It was an amazing day where the Pacific Island community simply 'took over' and we Palagi [Pākehā] had no idea what to expect or what to do next. The Samoan

community were very familiar with all of this and pulled in all of their aiga [family] to help. It really was their day and a time for them to feel comfortable in the school."

The Tahī School multilingual fono was also greatly appreciated by parents and seen as a "main celebration of each culture". The Connections worker felt that having translators present and culturally appropriate food available contributed towards this success. Rima School is developing an international garden as part of its celebration of the diversity of school cultures. Families can bring a plant that is significant to their culture, and plant the garden together with their children and other family.

Some schools also more routinely incorporate measures that reflect the cultural diversity of their school. Two schools regularly had their newsletter translated into other languages to enhance school-to-parent communication. One school principal spoke of trying to access lots of bilingual books (in a variety of languages) so that parents and children could still read together at night, as part of their 'schoolwork'. By taking into account parents' own capabilities and cultures, this principal made it easier for parents to be partners in their children's education, both inside and outside the school.

### **Information and communication**

Communication is crucial to parent-school relationships, and to maximise parental involvement, schools need to make sure that parents know about upcoming happenings of interest. Some parents need plenty of notice to inform the rest of the family and to make the necessary plans to attend (for example, taking time off work, or arranging for childcare of other children).

Rua School was keen to find out about the best ways of communicating with their parents.

Parent survey respondents identified:

- > newsletters (92 percent)
- > parent/teacher interviews (79 percent)
- > school reports (74 percent)
- > casual conversations with the teacher (68 percent)
- > weekly updates on homework (50 percent)
- > telephone updates (29 percent)
- > emails (29 percent).

In this school, home visits by school staff (13 percent) was a more popular form of communication than the website.

Almost one-third of Rua school parent survey respondents said they would like more communication from the school about events. One parent suggested, “An annual calendar of events for the school given at the beginning of each year plus term reminders, ie, school trips, assemblies, holidays, sports events etc. If I know in advance, I can book annual leave at work to help out.”

Two-thirds of Rua School parent survey respondents said they would like more frequent and timely communication about their child, including updates on what they’re doing well at, suggesting areas where they could have extra help and information on social skills. A number suggested notes in a homework book as a way of keeping in touch more informally. In response to this the school has put in place a two-way homework book for both parents and teachers to comment in and ask questions through. Also included is weekly goal setting which teachers, kids and parents work together to achieve.

Sending newsletters out in a variety of ways (for example, email or post) helps ensure more parents receive information. One school even emails newsletters overseas, complete with pictures of children, to keep families in touch with what’s happening.

### ***Benefits of community agency involvement***

Social service/community agency involvement in schools can help increase parental involvement, foster parent-school relationships and support families. Aside from the outcomes, principals and families saw a variety of other benefits from Connections’ involvement with their school.

### ***Added resource capacity***

The Connections worker added resource capacity to schools. When a teacher who coordinated and facilitated a school’s pre-school programme left, the Connections worker was easily transferable to this role. Similarly, the Connections worker injected fresh energy into other groups and ideas. One principal says, “I’ve really appreciated someone who is active, engaged and gives feedback on what is happening.”

By contributing to events, groups and courses the Connections worker helped provide more opportunities for parental involvement and parent-school relationship building. The key to the Connections worker being accepted as part of schools and school communities was that she was a constant presence. The

Connections worker’s independence from the school, but reliability as a member of a group, helped groups gain traction and sustainability. Parents in one group said, “Our group ran for a while, briefly, before the Connections worker came. But it’s hard. It didn’t run very well either.” Another school principal states, “The Connections worker has taken a significant role in the pre-school group and helped them to become self-sufficient and self-sustaining, which is good.”

In addition, the Connections worker has also helped schools with creating programmes accessing physical resources and research. As one principal states, “She’s a resource person.” Parents respond:

The Connections worker was doing quite a bit of work with us on that. She got a schedule together and it was based on things that they [the pre-schoolers] enjoyed.

She got some new resources for the group which was really good because we didn’t have a whole lot of stuff. We got a lot of new toys.

She helped organise that [event] with us and got some stuff donated for the adults.

She’s put out a flyer and done a lot of advertising.

I don’t think we would have got the event off the ground if she hadn’t been here to help us.

Parents appreciated the time and energy the Connections worker was able to devote to their groups. They felt this relieved them of some organisational responsibility, or pressure, making belonging to the group more about fun. Some parents felt having to make commitments to the group would have been off-putting, as children’s changing routines (such as their sleep times) make flexibility an asset:

And it was good because if you couldn’t make it, it was no biggie, whereas with other things it was scheduled and you had to go.

You don’t have to make up any excuses ... you don’t have to show up at all.

The Connections worker’s involvement in groups, such as the PTAs, did help the groups’ continued membership numbers, momentum and focus on parental involvement. In this sense she enhanced community capacity. The Connections worker also observed over the year that the groups became a

lot stronger and closer. These positive results are attributable to principals trying new ways to engage with parents, and the fun the parents themselves had in their meetings. One group, previously struggling for members, helped initiate and organise family-focused activities. This could demonstrate an increase in the group's levels of confidence, as well as a new focus on families and communities.

**Neutral support**

Parents felt that the Connections worker's independence from the school, providing neutral support, was an asset given her role. They expressed a preference for having somebody independent facilitating parent connections, rather than a school staff member or fellow parent. The Connections worker's familiarity in schools and communities, and various tasks, saw her viewed as a friend, parent, school staff member, social worker, facilitator, events coordinator and many other roles. These roles made the Connections worker accessible to all of the schools' communities (rather than targeted groups, as social workers often are). However, both parents and principals described her role as one of a 'neutral support person' indicating she is seen as non-partisan, non-threatening and easy to relate to. Parents comment:

With having an independent person ... that keeps it neutral and there's like no hidden agenda or nothing like that... I think having an independent person definitely helps a parent group run best.

Sometimes you might just want to ask something, and an independent person is really important.

Having an outside person [facilitate the group] is better.

Parents also felt the Connections worker's social service background was useful. "Other people wouldn't have the resources to different communities, different counselling agencies, different agencies, whatever. She's more knowledgeable to what's available on the whole... Like [another parent] would say I know of this service and that's it. But there's different services for different things and [the Connections worker] seems to be very knowledgeable on all that."

**Considerations for community agencies**

**Benefits of a community development approach**

Becoming a group member helped break down some of the 'us/them' barriers between parents and

professionals. The Connections worker was seen firstly as a parent and a contributor to the community, rather than a 'professional'. In this way, the Connections worker was seen as walking alongside parents, rather than working on parents.

In some instances, the Connections worker was unable to obtain childcare for her own child during parent group meeting times, so she took her child with her to the group. While this was a make-do situation, it was beneficial in that it personalised the Connections worker and allowed parents to identify with the worker as a parent. It also enabled the worker to model parenting skills. While social workers sometimes choose not to disclose any personal information about themselves, this may have seemed unnatural within these informal parent-centred settings. It could have reinforced the Connections worker's social work status, and therefore led to more guarded participation or discussion from the group. This style and approach of working could be seen by some as crossing boundaries, but it should not be understood as 'unprofessional'. The worker was professional, but easy to relate to, and took an authentic participatory role alongside the other members of the group. Parents respond:

I think [the Connections worker] being a parent herself, so you know she's got some knowledge of what it's like, some experience and stuff, you might just get an idea off what she did.

She's a parent herself so got street credibility. It's less threatening, she's not a social worker.

Principals voiced similar viewpoints.

She's not a teacher, not employed here – she's one of them [the group], so there's less barriers.

**Benefits of building relationships**

Parents appreciated establishing a relationship with the Connections worker through proactive engagement, rather than solely as a response to problems. The Connections worker immersed herself in the parent communities, and initiated contact with parents wherever the opportunity presented itself. For example, when young people were taking part in courses, phone calls were made, and with permission, home visits. Parents were invited to family school events, where the Connections worker would introduce herself and initiate relationships with parents. The Connections worker joined existing groups and helped out.

Providing proactive services in schools is a particularly effective way of engaging with more families, and through establishing supportive relationships, reaching families who might not have otherwise engaged with social services. For example, facilitators of courses begin by introducing themselves to the parents by doing home visits, giving telephone updates that are based on the children's strengths, and inviting parents to participate in some of the programme's events. While there is parent involvement from the outset of the programme, the Connections worker commented that being a guest in a family's home was very humbling. She said that while the family appeared to feel okay with her being there and asking about their child, there was no hiding that the family faces financial stress, relationship stress, grief concerns over racism and bullying. Families open up to ask for more in-depth help should they require it, or give the worker permission to offer help.

Principals comment on one of Connections' points of difference:

She's responding in proactive ways, rather than as a case worker.

Community role is different to a social worker – she has relationships with [other schools], and community. And they're more receptive to her because of that and existing relationships.

There's a feeling amongst the parents that she's working with them, not on them

Proactively involving parents in schools could also enable parents to build up their own support networks through nurturing relationships with other parents and the school.

### ***Responsiveness and flexibility***

The Connections initiative clearly demonstrated the issues when trying to apply a 'one size fits all' approach to effective involvement in different schools. It was important for the Connections worker to be flexible in responding to each school's community's real and present needs. The Connections worker worked in a variety of unanticipated ways, in response to requests from school communities. For example, a trusted relationship with the school and the children allowed the Connections worker to conduct independent research on behalf of schools.

Working with pre-existing school groups which were important to the members allowed the Connections worker to have a constant presence within the school

and with the school community. From the roles taken within these groups, the worker can gain insight, establish trusted relationships and be useful to communities. Conversations led to concerns being aired, and ideas being developed. Examples include the parenting skills course developed from the parent support group, the Safe course developed after the bullying research and the new entrants' course instigated by the coffee mornings. A strong relationship with the parent community therefore allows for many opportunities to support it in ways that actually meet parents' needs. The Connections worker stated, "It takes the guesswork out of service development."

Even within each school initiative, flexibility is often a feature. One example of this is a parent group, set up originally like a PTA, but constantly evolving to accommodate and explore whatever the group brings to the weekly meetings. Parents appreciate this flexibility. It meant they are able to talk about difficulties as they occur. Parents respond:

I think it works well that if one of us has had something particular in that week, you can come in and say well this is what's happened and have everyone's input into it and it works really well like that. And I think it's the way to go.

I think if the group got to 'this is what we're doing today', then people would lose interest. Because if that particular thing doesn't really match needs, then a lot of people wouldn't bother attending, whereas with flexibility ... that's what makes it exciting.

In response to these parents' requests, a parenting course was delivered. These parents had attended parenting courses in the past, and found they worked for others, but not for them. The programmes and/or facilitators had not recognised the need for strategies for children with disabilities. The Connections worker discussed this with a PSUSI social worker whose background was in mental health. This social worker summed up the parent group's needs as being for a parenting programme not based on facilitators assuming they know what the parents need to know. The social worker was then introduced to the group and used a range of narrative and psychodrama techniques to explore parents' own identified parenting dilemmas. The approach of talking through anything that the parents brought up worked well and has remained as the structure of the meetings since.



Parents really appreciated the individualised support and responsiveness of the service that was provided. The researcher was reminded of this when she asked the parents to think about the future of their school initiative: “Well thinking about the future is hard, because you don’t know what’s going to crop up. Yeah but if you ring her [the Connections worker] she seems to know where a starting point is.”

**Action research benefits**

The action research approach adopted by this project had a number of benefits. It enabled the service to be reflective and responsive, and sat easily with the community development approach taken by the Connections worker. The Connections worker felt that conducting the research led to further service development opportunities. The research context enabled the organisation to use open-ended questions, asking principals to reflect on both the school community and the service. Without the research purpose, many of these questions could not have been asked or answered in such depth. One of the principal’s interviews opened the door to further work in the school building relationships through a parents coffee group. Another principal talked about the importance of working with other schools during his interview, and has since been involved in discussion with another school about creating a community hub.

**Commitment and resourcing**

Social service organisations undertaking community development need to be committed to long-term involvement with communities and the schools, groups and other agencies with whom they are aligned. A concern for principals especially was whether Connections was a pilot initiative. The Connections worker felt one of the keys to her service success was her visibility or consistency of presence within the school, as this is key to building relationships with the parent community.

Community development can be time intensive, and new ideas often take some time to catch on and build momentum. For example, when the Connections worker was trying to attract new members to the Parent Network Group, there were many phone calls to interested parents. Arranging a time that suited everyone was impossible, but it was possible to establish a most popular time, and to update people who couldn’t attend, by phone. It took three months

before a core group of five began attending regularly, but since then the group has gone from strength to strength. When groups gain sufficient momentum to be sustainable, it can be possible for the worker to withdraw, but it is important to remain in touch (both by phone and in person every now and then), and be open to the idea that more time and resource might need to be devoted at a future stage.

Similarly, the amount of time the Connections worker was involved in each school often varied between weeks. Time commitments also varied between schools, with some schools utilising the Connections worker quite intensively, while other schools utilised her more as an ideas catalyst. The key to success was being responsive to requests by the school community, rather than trying to impose standardised predetermined service levels or programmes.

**Potential future developments**

Reflecting on principals’ and parents’ comments, and the Connections worker’s case notes, other ideas speak to potential future ways of supporting families through schools.

**Working more closely with all school staff, not just principals**

The Connections worker worked mostly with school principals, rather than all staff. A future development could be to work with all staff in order to further nurture a whole-of-school approach to supporting families. In one school, opportunities for building relationships with staff arose when the principal invited the PSUSI school and community team to take part in their staff team-building day.

**A place for parents in schools**

Four principals spoke about having a place for parents within the school. This was described as a separate space that could provide information from the school as well as community agencies. The principals also mentioned having coffee and tea available and allowing somewhere for parents to meet, catch up and, in one school, possibly provide a pre-school facility.

**Community hubs**

Research is underway within two school communities to determine the feasibility of establishing a community hub. The current idea surrounding these community hubs is a place on the school grounds that caters for the school, but also for the whole community: possibly



a hall or café that houses community and government agencies supporting the community. Examples might include Work and Income, the community constable, Refugee and Migrant Services and counselling, amongst others.

### **Community development focus**

Learning from Connections informed PSUSI's service development, and a number of new initiatives to support families have taken place. These focus on engaging with parents in their own communities, and helping parents add to their social capital. Examples include the post-assembly coffee morning in Wha School, and a Toru School worker accessing funding for a local swim club and making coffees to assist the parents' networking in the community. The worker states, "This was a simple concept that supported a community club to establish and grow. It has facilitated connection and belonging for some isolated members of the community." This increased focus on community development starts with listening to the school community, and is underpinned by notions of partnership and empowering the school community.

### **Increasing inter-school collaboration**

During the principals' interviews, principals expressed that sharing ideas between schools was helpful. They suggested some changes in the format of the newsletter, so that it could be easily circulated to parents as well as to their staff. They also suggested an online blog to allow schools and parents to share information with each other. Some principals talked about collaborating with other schools to support young people transitioning from one school to another. For example, some principals visited kindergartens to meet prospective students, or contributed towards orientating families to the local intermediates.

### **Learning about parental involvement**

Principals agreed that parental involvement was important to the school and the children:

Families are crucial to schools; we [school staff] can only do so much.

Parental involvement shows children that school is valued by their parents, it models that they should be involved and participating.

The influence of work on parents' involvement with school varied, depending on the number of working parents. As one principal said, "I suspect a reasonably

high number of our parents work. We also have a lot of single parents and a number of families where one parent lives overseas." These factors can also impact on parents' other commitments and their availability.

Most parents want to be involved in their children's school because they associate it with a variety of benefits. For example, in the Rua School survey the vast majority of parents (89 percent) thought that it was a good idea for parents to be involved with school. Reasons why they wanted to be involved included:

- > being kept informed, and supporting their child
- > acknowledging it's a major part of their child's life
- > knowing what's happening with their children and their education
- > meeting other parents of kids
- > taking some pressure off staff
- > helping to understand children's activities better so they get better ideas at home.

As one parent said, "School is an enormous part of your children's life. They spend every day there for 13 years: you need to be interested and involved." Another parent said, "Being involved makes me feel good. When I go into the class they say hello and come up and give me a big hug."

Despite this, many parents are not very involved with the school. A number of barriers influence this. Rua School parents said the greatest barriers to involvement were work (67 percent) and lack of time (64 percent). Other barriers included transport (27 percent) and other children to care for (24 percent). Staff approachability was not seen as a barrier by any of the parents responding.

Parents taking part in focus groups were not specifically asked about barriers to involvement in school, as most of them were very involved in school life. Most of these parents were not working, working part-time or working flexible hours. This is perhaps what enabled them to take part in such groups. One explained, "I just work part-time, and it's quite flexible, so there's no hassle." Another, who attended a parent group on Fridays, said, "I got to choose my hours and have Fridays off work. I work 20 hours over the other four days rather than five, and that suited my employer too."

In their interviews, all young people said they liked it when their parents were involved at school, and several expressed a desire for their parents to be more involved in their school life. One said, “My mum can’t really come in because she had a baby not long ago, well she’s one and she makes a lot of noise so she can’t come now. But when she used to come that was really great.”

Interestingly, although unprompted about work, young people were well aware of the impact of parental work on time spent at school. When we asked young people how they felt when their parents came into school, more than half of the young people talked about work. They responded:

My dad and mum try to come in, but it’s really difficult sometimes because they’re not together and both have to work to get money and stuff.

Mum has to work and dad doesn’t have enough time [to come to school] because he does computer jobs and teaches the guitar.

Mum doesn’t come much ’cos she works, so I don’t know. When she does come I feel supported or something.

Overall, work was clearly the greatest barrier to parental involvement in this school.

Potentially, it also appeared to be harder to involve parents as children age. For example, classroom get-togethers in Toru School were attended by 97 percent of middle school parents, but only 50 percent of senior school parents. This might reflect a parental view that children need less parental involvement as they age, but it might also be influenced by increasing numbers of parents working as their children get older.

#### **Learning about service development**

Prior to devising the original plan for Connections, PSUSI received support from schools to approach parents’ employers for time off work to be involved in their children’s schools. However, PSUSI did not check directly with parents to see if this would work for them. The action research method enabled a new plan to be devised, but the learning remained. Prior to designing an innovative service it is beneficial to consult with all those the service is intended to reach.

### **3.1.4 Schools: Limitations**

#### **Service delivery**

The Connections worker worked mostly with school principals, rather than all staff. While the principal plays a key role in any school, this approach in some respects relied on information and ideas trickling down to other school staff, which may have been a limitation.

#### **Research methods**

The Connections initiative was very diverse and broad. This meant a lot of the research (such as participant evaluations and the Rua School survey) had to be designed for just one course of purpose. This is a resource intensive process, and could also affect the ability to generalise from the results. For example, results from the Rua School survey provided some interesting food for thought about ways of communicating with the school, but these should not be generalised to be representative of the other schools. Other schools would need to conduct their own research for results to be specific to their school community.

Participant evaluations, whilst specific to each initiative, were designed to provide information on common outcomes (such as strengthening relationships). Examining these across the different activities and different sites allowed the researchers to establish a pattern of outcomes associated with groups, events and courses. While evidence was provided that the Connections initiatives in school contributed towards all the outcomes outlined, this should not be taken to mean each of those outcomes was experienced for every particular individual taking part.

Connections was only undertaken in primary schools, and as parent involvement in schools seems to decrease with age, it cannot be assumed working in similar ways would help support families in intermediate or secondary schools.

Referring back to Table 1, it is clear that more research was conducted in some schools than others. While this partly reflects the uneven spread of Connections service activity, given time it would have been beneficial to conduct parent focus groups and student interviews in Toru and Wha Schools.

Focus groups with parents were only conducted with parent group participants. Whilst this was appropriate for evaluating the outcomes associated with Connections, organisational learning about parents' school relationships as a whole could have benefited from input from a broader group of parents, such as through a whole-of-school survey. The group participants were highly involved in school life and this may have affected some of the information about school approachability in that they were already involved.

The Rua School parent survey had a high response rate, possibly helped by children being involved in the process and offered a chocolate fish upon returning the completed surveys from their parents. Group and event participants were less likely to respond to surveys. Similarly, principals were more responsive to face-to-face interview opportunities than to answering surveys. Qualitative information provided during interviews and focus groups was richer than the qualitative information gleaned from open-ended survey responses, which were generally brief.

As Connections had no formally enrolled clients posting out client evaluations was not possible. PSUSI is currently revising how it gathers feedback from a range of clients, including those using the Connections service; however, evaluations will continue to be outcomes focused.

During the project there were a number of lessons learnt about data collection and the pros and cons of different research methods. There were some challenges for schools collecting parent participation data. It added another administrative task to their workload, and sometimes it appeared particular events or types of parent help missed being counted. This suggests schools will need appropriate encouragement and support if a greater focus on parents in schools is to be supported by empirical data.

The researchers learnt that schools need to understand the relevance of information they are being asked to collect, and if relationships need to be formed prior to making requests for data, longer timeframes might be needed for evaluative projects. Data requirements need to be clearly explained, and a variety of ways of collecting the data suggested, along with examples. It would also be useful to emphasise that methods used

to collect data need to be the same across the time periods for which data were being collected. Another helpful idea would be to regularly check on data collection.

## 3.2 Supporting families through workplaces

PSUSI's original idea of accessing employers through working school parents proved unpopular so other ways of reaching working parents were devised. Two new ways (or service activities) were chosen to support families through workplaces. Firstly, an employment initiative dubbed 'Family Leave' was trialled and evaluated within PSUSI. Secondly, the 'It's About Time' conference was held to help other workplaces explore how they could support families.

### 3.2.1 Family leave: Background and context

PSUSI was convinced that providing employees with paid time off work to nurture relationships was a good idea. They felt sure many benefits would flow from this for families, schools and for workplaces. PSUSI considered how it could convince other employers that this was a good idea. The simple answer was to show them by implementing Family Leave in PSUSI and measuring the benefits.

It is important to note that Family Leave at PSUSI did not occur in a vacuum, but as part of a purposeful attempt to develop an organisational culture based on respect and care for all people, including employees. This ethos is incorporated into both the bigger picture through PSUSI's strategic objectives, and into everyday work practice through key performance targets and indicators. For example, the CEO is responsible for 'maintaining a positive and co-operative employee climate'. Data contributing to an assessment of this objective are then obtained through a staff climate survey.

One of PSUSI's core values and missions is to support families. Employees are committed to supporting families through the organisation, and in turn the organisation wanted to help employees support theirs. An initial survey (the Pre-Family Leave survey) explored how the organisation could help support employees' family relationships. This indicated a great deal of support for Family Leave. When employees were asked

which initiatives they wanted, extra paid annual leave received almost double the support of any other initiative. Family Leave was implemented and a post-Family Leave survey conducted nine months after implementation to examine the impact of Family Leave for employees and their family. These people are referred to throughout this report as Family Leave users. Further details of the pre-and post-Family Leave surveys are contained in the Methodology section, and copies of the surveys are at Appendix 6. Response rates to the survey were 38 percent and 48 percent of all staff respectively. Most of PSUSI's interest was in assessing the impact of Family Leave through the post-Family Leave survey.

Staff respondents of the post-Family Leave survey broadly reflected the overall staff demographic in terms of gender. Fifteen percent of staff respondents were in the 20-39-year age group, 69 percent in the 40-59-year age group and 15 percent of respondents were over 60. In regards to ethnicity, staff respondents predominantly identified as New Zealand European/Pākehā, with nine percent identifying as Māori, five percent as Pacific people and a few identifying as other, predominantly European, cultures. No comparative organisational data are available regarding all staff ages or ethnicity. However, the CEO of PSUSI's states, "Intuitively, these age and ethnicity breakdowns seem broadly representative of our workforce as a whole."

**TABLE 4: Respondent comparison**

	Gender		Region					Hours		Used family leave	
	Male	Female	ChCh	Ashburton	Nelson	Marlborough	North Cnty	Part-time	Full-time (30+ hours)	Yes	No
<b>Staff respondents</b>	9%	91%	32%	11%	25%	15%	12%	40%	60%	59%	41%
<b>All staff</b>	7%	93%	24%	7%	27%	31%	11%	54%	36%	38%	62%

In other ways, staff respondents were less reflective of the overall workforce. The Christchurch and Ashburton regions were overrepresented, and the Marlborough region underrepresented. Much of PSUSI's Marlborough workforce is employed part-time, and this could partly explain the underrepresentation of part-time workers responding to the survey.

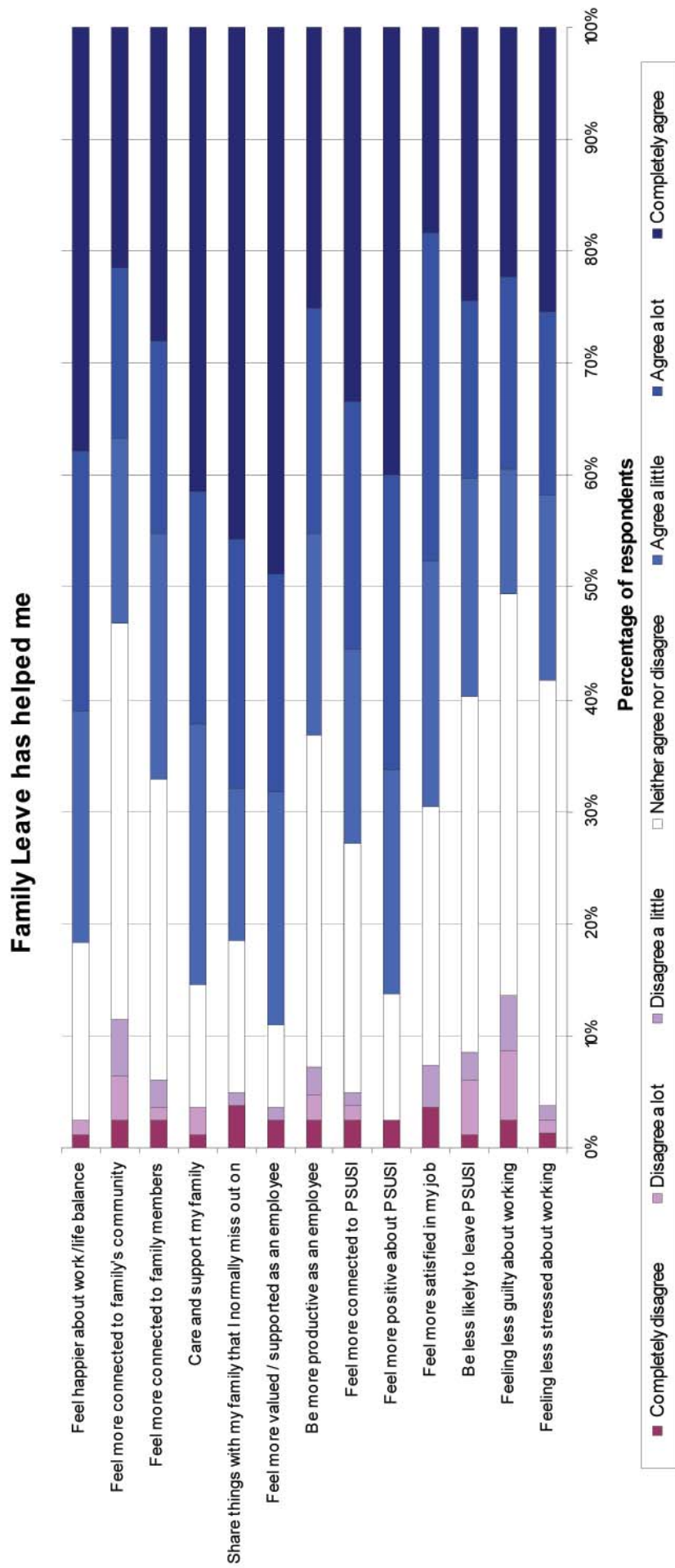
A greater proportion of staff respondents than all staff had used Family Leave, with 59 percent of staff respondents using Family Leave, compared to an

overall staff uptake rate of 38 percent. Together this may indicate that full-timers are more likely than part-timers to use Family Leave.

**3.2.2 Family leave: Outcomes**

Family Leave users were asked if they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements about Family Leave, to help evaluate outcomes. Figure 3 contains a diagrammatic presentation of their responses. Most staff respondents agreed that Family Leave helped them in a variety of ways.

**FIGURE 3: Users' views on family leave**



**Outcome 1: Increased parent participation in school**

Thirty-four percent of Family Leave users indicated they used Family Leave to be involved in schools or pre-schools. A number of these respondents indicated they would not have been involved if Family Leave had not been available.

**Outcome 2: Increased family together time**

Fifty-nine percent of staff respondents used Family Leave for a variety of purposes, enabling support to a diversity of family members in many different ways. Most commonly, Family Leave was used to attend events with family, take them to appointments or help them out in some other practical way. Several staff respondents used Family Leave on more than one occasion. Overall, 75 percent of Family Leave users spent Family Leave with their children, 22 percent used it to be with older parents, 31 percent used it to be with other relations and one percent used it to be with a friend.

The range of purposes for taking Family Leave included:

- Taking my mother (82 years old) to medical and out-of-town appointments
- Attending my son’s sports day at school
- Going to my grandchildren’s pet and project day at school
- Providing parent help on a school outing
- Spending time when family from out of town came visiting
- Attending pre-school activity, going to doctors with sick children and helping care for my sick daughter and grandson
- Attending my mother’s rest home carers’ meeting
- Helping my son shift
- Supporting my sister after she had a car accident
- Taking one hour per week over the winter to combine with my tea hour to coach my daughter’s hockey team
- Being with my son when he had an upset day and wouldn’t stay at school

Family Leave was also used to temporarily relieve other family members of their caring obligations. Several grandparents used it to look after grandchildren on days when their parents needed to work:

I used it to babysit two grandsons when family work commitments clashed.

I was able to look after my grandson while his parents had a holiday. I did lots of really fun things with him.

I looked after grandchildren while daughter [was] at a hospital appointment and at a work meeting.

Therefore the ability to use Family Leave positively impacted on the lives of multiple family members, and even multiple workplaces. Family Leave also enabled many families to share experiences that they would otherwise have missed out on. Eighty-two percent of Family Leave users agreed with this:

It was fantastic to be able to take ‘small time chunks’ off to be involved in my child’s school activities. I would definitely have missed out on these otherwise.

Prior to Family Leave, my family suffered because of my commitment to work and where sick or annual leave were not appropriate for the occasion.

Family Leave enables me to stay in touch with family in a way that otherwise would have been impossible.

**Outcome 3: Strengthened family relationships**

**Helping support families**

The majority of Family Leave users (85 percent) felt that Family Leave helped them to care for and support their family. Many staff shared heart-warming stories about what Family Leave meant to their family:

Family Leave means in spite of working full-time I can still look forward to attending my grandson’s school events or my husband’s hospital appointments or other family events.

It was great to be available to family members.



It's SO valuable. Children grow up quickly and experience a lot of new situations. Would like to be by their side all the time to guide and help. Family Leave has really helped.

My daughter was experiencing some very traumatic family problems and needed a good dose of her mummy.

Family Leave has made a huge difference emotionally – being able to support family members using this leave.

Some related what Family Leave meant for others in their family:

My mum and my sister were very grateful I could attend their appointments.

The events I took Family Leave for were important to both me and the recipients.

My husband said, 'It was great to have my wife

working with me at our recent full day business event. Her support and skills made all the difference, and were very much appreciated.'

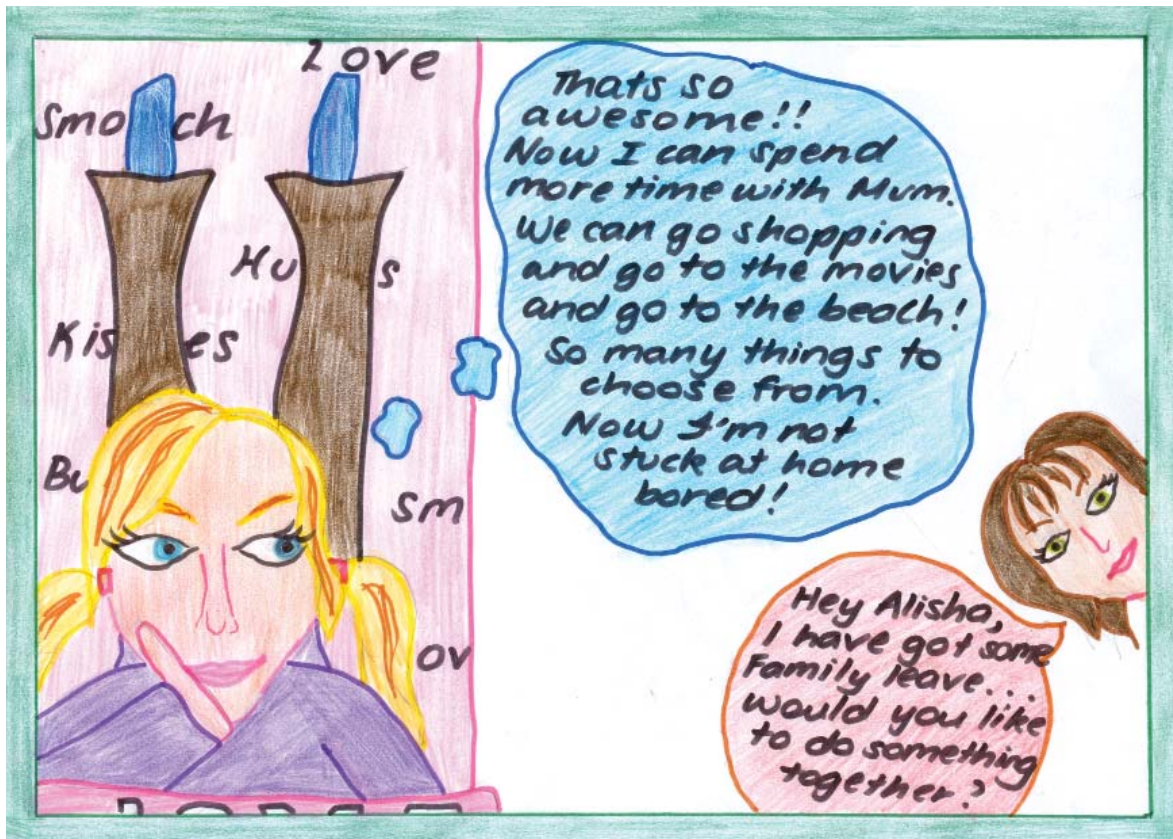
Emotionally, my son and his wife would have felt more stressed and isolated had I not been able to be there.

Me being able to be with my family makes my family happier because they see their mum, or wife, contented – this is what we all want for our family.

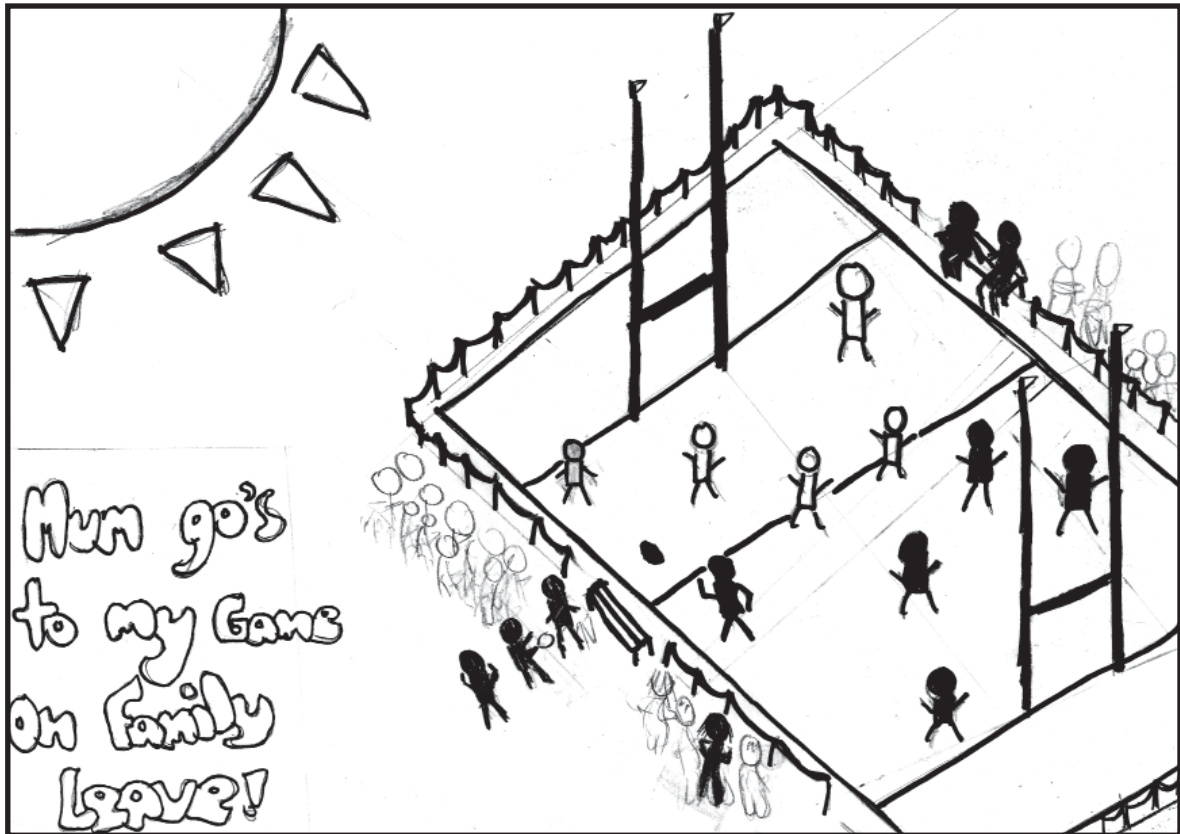
My son and his wife say 'It's just so cool when you're around, we can just sit back and relax and know the kids are in good hands and the kids get so excited about spending time with you. It's so important to us all as an extended family.'

Several young people drew pictures illustrating what Family Leave meant to them.

**FIGURE 4: Young people's pictures**







The pictures tell stories of what young people and their parents did when their parents were on Family Leave. Several of them depict parents attending events through school or pre-school groups, such as shows or sporting games. One eight-year-old boy drew his mother attending a school celebration of learning. He said this made him 'feel good' and it came through in his picture, with the audience all clapping. Older children agreed. A teenage boy said, "I love it when mum comes to watch my sports. It makes winning even better, so much more elating." A teenage girl was grateful for Family Leave, because it meant she didn't have to look after her younger sisters, and her younger sisters were grateful because it meant they could "spend more time with mum". As one said, "We can go shopping, and go to the movies and go to the beach. So many things to choose from. Now I'm not stuck at home bored." She associated time together with her mum with words like "love, smooch, hugs and kisses".

**Helping connect with families**

Figure 3 shows that most Family Leave users (67 percent) also felt that Family Leave helped them feel

more connected to family members. Typical comments from staff and their families included:

Family Leave was quality time spent together and has drawn us closer to each other.

My daughter just beamed when she heard I would be able to coach the team... She is really proud of 'her dad' the coach, and the games are a real family affair.

My mum said "it was great to have my daughter's support when a family crisis struck. It enabled the whole family to pull together as a team and support me when I needed it most".

**Outcome 4: Strengthened parent-school relationships**

As previously mentioned, 34 percent of Family Leave users used Family Leave to be involved in their family's school or pre-school. Many of these spoke of enjoying being part of the school community and being more involved with school:

Family Leave has enabled me to feel more involved at my daughter's school as necessary.

It was good to watch my son compete in his athletics. It was wonderful to experience being part of the school community in such an informal way.

It was great to see the way the teachers worked and interacted with the children. Great to meet the other parents.

Without Family Leave I would have missed the opportunity to feel part of the school community which is important to me.

Schools and clubs were also seen to benefit from Family Leave:

Pre-school indicated that they really appreciate the support extended family give to the pre-school activities.

I was able to coach the team. The club was struggling for coaches and it meant I could be involved in the weekend game as well.

The Family Leave survey did not specifically enquire whether staff respondents thought their relationship with schools was strengthened as a result of Family Leave, because many respondents had not used their Family Leave to be in schools. However, it did ask more broadly if Family Leave helped them feel more connected to their family's community (for example, other parents, clubs, schools, rest homes or healthcare providers). Figure 3 shows that over half of staff respondents indicated it had. But this was a relatively low level of agreement when compared with other positive statements about Family Leave.

Overall, about one-third of staff respondents used Family Leave to be in schools. Qualitative comments from some of these staff indicate relationships with the

school may have been strengthened to a degree as a result of Family Leave. However, the main relationships strengthened by Family Leave have been relationships between family members and Family Leave users and their employer.

#### **Outcome 5: Enhanced families' support network**

Family Leave helped some employees to think of work as part of their support network.

Figure 3 shows the vast majority (89 percent) of Family Leave users agreed that Family Leave has made them feel more valued and supported as an employee. They felt Family Leave was a practical way of the organisation showing they are "an employer that cares" about them and their families, and they felt "acknowledged as a family member and a parent":

I felt proud of, and supported by Presbyterian Support.

I feel valued as an employee, that the organisation would go the extra mile for us.

Positive affirming organisation, which views me as a whole person not just a production unit.

It's a very generous policy which shows we are valued as staff.

Many staff also mentioned that Family Leave shows "PSUSI values families", and staff talked about feeling "empowered" by the organisation.

#### **Outcome 7: Enhanced employees' work-life balance**

A large number of Family Leave users (82 percent) agreed Family Leave helped them feel happier about their work-life balance. This was verified by comparing people's ratings of their work-life balance before and after Family Leave.

**FIGURE 5: Pre- and post-Family Leave work-life balance**

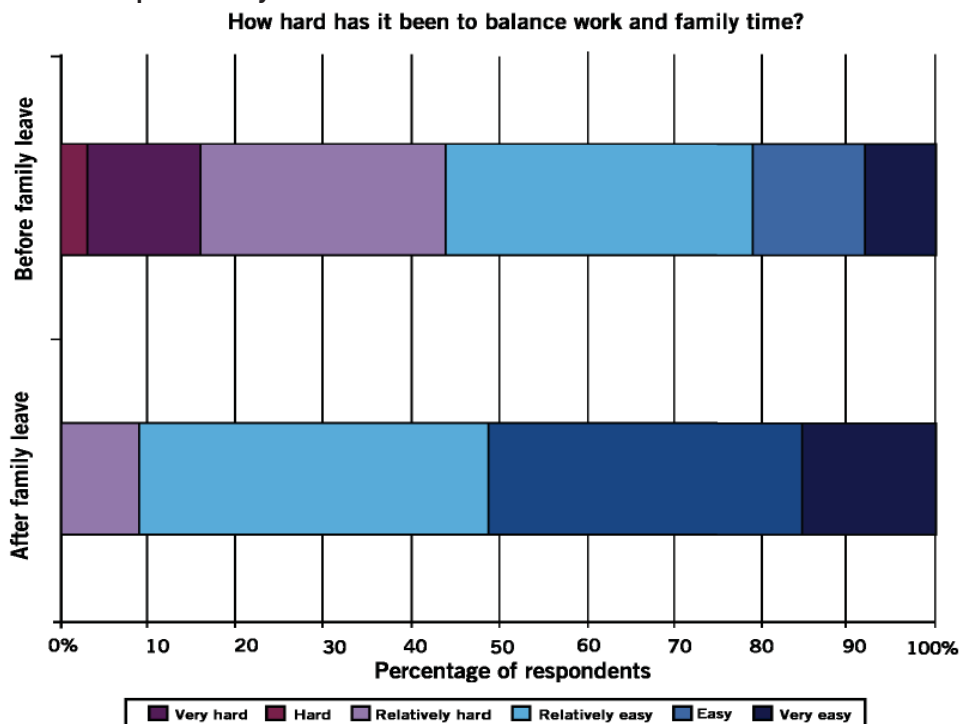


Figure 5 shows that prior to Family Leave 44 percent of respondents were finding it relatively hard, hard or very hard to balance work and family time. Since Family Leave this figure has decreased to just nine percent. Family Leave users have said:

Family Leave has definitely made a difference to myself and family, knowing I can be involved more with them and at the same time be able to work, so more contentment all round.

Family Leave has helped me not to feel torn between work and family, especially when family have been in crisis and needed support.

**Less stress**

Over half (58 percent) of Family Leave users agreed that Family Leave helped them feel less stressed about working, saying there’s “less stress” and “I’m not so much worried if I can’t work because of family needs”:

It’s family-friendly and aware so I enjoy working here and doesn’t make juggling home and work stressful.

Family Leave has provided a great sense of relief.

**Less guilt**

Half of all Family Leave users said Family Leave helped them to feel less guilty about working. A typical

comment was “I don’t feel guilty asking to attend to my children’s needs whenever possible. In the past in other jobs I felt when I was at work I had to forget my other role as a mother.” Another said, “It means less guilt attached to asking for time off to be with family.”

**Job satisfaction**

Figure 3 shows that 69 percent of Family Leave users agreed that Family Leave helped them to feel more satisfied in their job.

**Outcome 8: Strengthened employer-employee relationships**

As already mentioned under Outcome 5, Family Leave helped users to feel more valued by the organisation. Many Family Leave users said it also helped them to feel more connected to the organisation and more positive about the workplace, creating good staff morale.

**Feeling positive**

A large majority of Family Leave users (86 percent) indicated Family Leave helped them to feel more positively about their employer. Many expressed gratitude for this “very generous” policy, saying they “appreciate the consideration”. Typical comments included:

It’s a company that is open to change, that in turn will benefit its workers.

I am very grateful to PSUSI. I feel valued by them. It makes me feel very loyal to them.

I am proud that PSUSI has introduced this.

It was immeasurably helpful to have this leave.

### **Feeling connected**

Figure 3 shows 72 percent of Family Leave users felt Family Leave helped them feel more connected to the organisation. Several also spoke of family members feeling included, and part of the organisation, through Family Leave:

I feel more valued as a person, not just an employee, therefore I feel quite connected to the organisation. I feel PSUSI is genuinely living the vision it has for others, and valuing families and supporting parenting.

My daughter felt that PSUSI was valuing family members of employees as well as their employees – there was a sense of family being part of the organisation.

My husband was amazed that PSUSI just allocated extra hours for 'family matters'. We both saw this as an indication of walking the talk. Well done PSUSI.

Staff felt more positive about their employer, more connected to the organisation and more satisfied in their work. As a result, better staff relationships permeate the workplace, and there was a more positive workplace culture.

These positive feelings and workplace culture have benefits for the organisation as well. Several Family Leave users spoke about the unique aspects of Family Leave:

Family Leave means family is important.

It was great not to have to make the time up on another day.

It was a load off my shoulders knowing I still get paid while spending the odd quality time with my family.

### **Outcome 9: Organisational benefits for PSUSI**

#### **Improved productivity**

Sixty-three percent of Family Leave users agreed that Family Leave helped them to be more productive at work, saying that Family Leave led to "better work output", and "stress relief and work-life balance". One Family Leave user said, "Maybe this contributes to why I meet and exceed my work targets."

#### **Improved staff retention**

Figure 3 shows 60 percent of Family Leave users agreed they were less likely to leave the organisation's employment because of Family Leave. Whilst some felt it would be "a minor encouragement to stay" others felt it influenced their decision "quite considerably", providing a "strong pull factor to stay". As one employee explained, "I am very grateful to them. I feel valued by them. It makes me feel very loyal to them." Typical comments included:

I think it would be hard to find another organisation committed to maintaining family life as well as work life. I would have to think long and hard about leaving.

It would impact on my decision a great deal. I would be looking for similar levels of support.

I'm less likely to leave as it makes things stress free.

I have considered getting another job and it [family leave] was a consideration. Family Leave has equated not only to an extra half a week's annual leave, but to a real commitment to my personal happiness, which has boosted my loyalty to the organisation. You can compare annual leave but you can never be sure how a new employer's attitude or treatment on a personal level will be.

Since implementing Family Leave, there was a sizeable reduction in staff turnover at PSUSI, down from 23.1 percent to 20 percent. This includes a large Home Support workforce where national turnover figures for this sector usually sit at round 30 percent. The reduced turnover was welcome as the retention and motivation of staff continues to be an issue of great and increasing importance for not for profit organisations (Grant Thorndon, 2008). The 3.1 percent reduction in staff turnover meant significant savings in recruitment and training. Based on current staffing levels, the CEO estimated this equated to recruiting and training 10 new staff, at a cost of at least \$70,000. It also meant increased personnel retention (so more consistency of staff) in an industry where relationships are of crucial importance.

#### **Impact on other leave**

Several Family Leave users talked about the impact of Family Leave on their use of other forms of leave:

Family Leave has meant precious leave was kept to have a decent holiday and not sacrificed for smaller family events. That is, not taking one day here and there and not being able to have a decent break.

It was fabulous being able to attend and assist with family activities and still have ‘my own’ sick and annual leave.

Family Leave has taken off some of the pressure of using my annual leave for mainly family support, family holidays, allowing some ‘me time’ to recharge my batteries, which is really fantastic.

Some staff respondents felt that Family Leave led to reduced absenteeism and led to a “more honest use of sick leave”. As an employee said, “These flexibility and work-life initiatives may have contributed to why I have had to take [only] one sick day.”

#### Recruitment tool

Family Leave was also seen as aiding staff recruitment. One staff respondent related, “As a positive recruitment enticement it’s great – interviewees are impressed. It feels good to be able to say we are family-friendly and to demonstrate how.” A recent employee concurred, “Finding out about Family Leave tipped the balance. It made me realise that the organisation was addressing the issue of parents spending time with their children. I think that’s just so important, so I turned down the other two interviews.”

### 3.2.3 Family Leave: Learning

Overall data showed that Family Leave had helped many staff respondents in a number of ways. The post-Family Leave survey indicated that Family Leave is a useful way of helping staff respondents feel valued and supported, and that the organisation cares about them and their family. It was particularly effective in supporting their family relationships and strengthening relationships between staff respondents and the organisation.

#### Factors influencing Family Leave

##### Workplace culture

It is important to emphasise that Family Leave was not implemented in isolation, but as part of a purposeful attempt by managers at all levels to support staff to feel content with both their work and family lives. Other flexibility initiatives were also undertaken. These included increasing the number of staff supported to work remotely and the formalisation of a time banking and time in lieu policy. Reflection on the programme, assessment of its implementation and management training about work-life and diversity initiatives are ongoing. Overall, this focus on supporting staff in their

work and family lives has positively impacted on staff. Workers’ self-ratings need to be seen in this context, as they may indicate the value of Family Leave appears to be quite above the experience of time off shared with their family. As one staff member says, “Family Leave reinforces the family-friendly atmosphere.”

#### Management support

The CEO, senior and line managers have all been strongly supportive of Family Leave.

Comments from staff respondents reflect their views of management:

It shows a caring management that are prepared to consider staff needs.

Before Family Leave I was already impressed by management’s willingness and encouragement around being flexible about hours and am now even more so.

It’s nice to know that if I use my Family Leave, my colleagues are supportive and understanding.

#### Responsive and flexible

Family Leave was developed in conjunction with staff and implemented after staff consultation. The pre-family leave survey indicated it was the family-friendly initiative that staff most favoured. This may partially have helped account for its success. As one staff respondent reflects, “PSUSI is a responsive and proactive employer.” Another aspect of Family Leave that seemed to really help the policy ‘fly’ was the flexibility of the policy, and the context of a high degree of trust. This meant staff didn’t have to justify or explain its use. Time off could be taken in any time increments, spending time with any family members<sup>4</sup>, or nurturing any key relationships.

#### Communication

Another organisational learning was that communication gaps during implementation could lead to suboptimal results. The post-Family Leave evaluation showed some staff respondents were unaware of their entitlement to Family Leave. Some staff respondents also asked specific questions about Family Leave. In response, PSUSI took steps to increase staff awareness, respond to questions and embed Family Leave in the organisation. A fact sheet about Family Leave was circulated to all staff, and an article written for the staff newsletter. In addition, a number of steps were taken to ‘institutionalise’ Family Leave. A formal Family Leave

<sup>4</sup> Although staff were able to use the leave to be with close friends, the overwhelming majority chose to spend time with family members.

policy was added to PSUSI's management manual and Family Leave was added as a category on leave forms. This means employees don't have to fill out a separate form and go through a different leave process. Staff have also suggested ensuring Family Leave shows as a category on fortnightly pay slips, as a practical way of reminding them of their entitlement and balance.

In addition, PSUSI took steps to increase management knowledge of flexible work and improve communication between staff and management. A strategic momentum day was held for key personnel that included compulsory workshops on time and balance in the workplace, flexible work in practice and managing changing communications and relationships. These workshops aimed to further foster a workplace culture that is supportive of respectful relationships and flexibility. Also a comprehensive list of PSUSI's work-life initiatives was circulated to all staff to increase staff awareness and uptake of such initiatives.

### **3.2.4 Family Leave: Limitations**

#### **Initiative limitations**

During the studied period, the 38 percent uptake rate of Family Leave by all staff was lower than desired. Three factors could have influenced this: the 'newness' of the initiative; the large number of PSUSI employees working part-time; and communication and implementation gaps surrounding Family Leave. Since the research was conducted, the uptake of Family Leave steadily increased and 48 percent of all staff used Family Leave in the 2008/09 financial year, although there is still much greater use of the leave by full-time than part-time staff.

Some may think Family Leave, or similar policies, would be unsuitable for profit-driven businesses whose core business activity is not supporting families. However, many profit-driven business successfully implement work-life or wellbeing initiatives (EEO Trust, 2007, 2008; New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development). Family-friendly initiatives do not need to be aligned with the organisation's purpose for being, but it is important that they are implemented in the context of a broadly supportive internal workplace culture.

#### **Research methods and limitations**

The pre-Family Leave survey was circulated after information about family leave had been circulated. During the period when respondents could reply to the survey the Family Leave policy came into effect. This

may have resulted in greater support for Family Leave. Although the survey questions make it clear responses should relate to pre-Family Leave opinions, ideally the pre-Family Leave survey should have been conducted earlier.

Although more than 115 staff responded to the pre- and post-Family Leave surveys, response rates (of 38 percent and 48 percent respectively) were still lower than desired. However, they were in line with the more general staff climate questionnaire, also a self-administered survey, indicating this was a systemic issue rather than a refusal specific to Family Leave. It is possible that non-respondents could have felt differently from respondents about Family Leave. However, as responses were anonymous there is no way of identifying a sample of non-respondents and trying to ascertain if this is the case.

Response rates could have been influenced by the fact that the research was conducted by PSUSI itself, rather than an independent organisation. Although the pre-Family Leave survey was analysed by an independent researcher, the post-Family Leave survey was not.

Potentially, this could also have contributed to the lack of negative information about Family Leave, as staff respondents could have been concerned, even though responses were anonymous, that they would somehow be identified or that their information would not be treated confidentially. However, the post-Family Leave response rate (48 percent) was higher than that of the independently analysed pre-Family Leave survey (38 percent).

As Table 3 shows, staff respondents differed from overall PSUSI staff composition in a number of ways, which could have resulted in some response bias. In particular, Family Leave users and full-time workers were overrepresented in the staff respondents while part-timers and those not using Family Leave were underrepresented. Those who had not used Family Leave might not feel as positive about it as those who had, which could partially account for the lack of negative responses. There is no way of checking on this, because only Family Leave users (not all staff respondents) were asked what Family Leave meant and how it had helped them. However, all staff respondents were given the opportunity to add anything else they wanted to say about Family Leave, so non-users of Family Leave had a chance to add negative comments. In addition, most staff respondents who had not used



Family Leave (86 percent) indicated they would use Family Leave in the future.

Another limiting factor that could be at play is the novelty of the Family Leave policy. It is possible that people appreciate Family Leave more because the policy is new, and they remember what it was like without it.

For confidentiality reasons, no unique identifiers were used in the surveys. Therefore it was not possible to compare individuals' responses across the two surveys and all comparative data were based on totals and means from each survey. However, post-Family Leave survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they completed the previous questionnaire, and those who had not were excluded from the analysis. Therefore although pre- and post-work-life balance scores cannot be compared for specific individuals, they can be compared across the same population group. Many post-Family Leave questions asked about actions or opinions since the implementation of Family Leave. No similar questions were asked in the pre-Family Leave survey. Therefore, including responses from all staff respondents or all Family Leave users in the analysis of these questions did not compromise the analysis.

### 3.2.5 Conference: Background and context

PSUSI wanted to increase the uptake of family-friendly initiatives in other workplaces, not just its own. Originally, other workplaces were going to be accessed through working school parents who had enrolled in Connections. But as no parents enrolled, another way of reaching other workplaces was devised. This involved hosting a conference for employers. The conference was hosted in collaboration with the EEO Trust and the Department of Labour. Speakers were invited from both local and central government to add interest, and increase the conference's visibility.

### 3.2.6 Conference: Outcomes

Pre- and post-conference surveys (contained at Appendices 7a and 7b), were used to evaluate whether the conference made a difference to participants' knowledge or attitudes about family-friendly initiatives. In addition, the evaluations asked participants about actions they were likely to take after attending the conference, and how influential they thought they would be on the uptake of family-friendly initiatives in their workplaces. They also asked how influential a variety of other incentives and mechanisms would be.

## Outcome 10: Conference participants' raised knowledge of family-friendly initiatives

**TABLE 5: Average knowledge**

Aspect of family-friendly knowledge	Pre-conference mean	Post-conference mean	P value <sup>5</sup>
	1 = no knowledge: 7= extremely knowledgeable		
Range of policies available	3.7	4.9	.000
Workplace benefits	4.1	5.2	.001
Employee benefits	4.3	5.3	.013
Influence on family life	4.3	5.3	.002
Policy challenges in the workplace	3.7	5.4	.000
Overcoming policy challenges in the workplace	3.1	4.4	.000

Table 5 shows conference respondents' awareness of various aspects of family-friendly initiatives increased as a result of the conference. There was a statistically significant increase in all of the listed six areas of knowledge:

- > the range of family-friendly initiatives workplaces can have
- > the workplace benefits of family-friendly initiatives
- > the employee benefits of family-friendly initiatives
- > the influence of family-friendly initiatives on family life

> the challenges for family-friendly policies in the workplace

> how to overcome some of the challenges to family-friendly policies in the workplace.

The greatest increase in knowledge was about the challenges to family-friendly initiatives. So it was encouraging that the second-highest gain in knowledge was about overcoming such challenges. Post-conference however, this was still the lowest overall area of people's knowledge.

<sup>5</sup> The figures in this column are the P values associated with a comparison between the means in the previous two columns. If a P value is .05 or less, then the difference between the two means is generally accepted to be statistically significant, because there is a 95 percent (or greater) chance that the difference between the results was not due to chance.

**Outcome 11: Furthered the adoption of family-friendly initiatives in the workplace**

**Raising support**

One aim of the conference was to increase the level of support for family-friendly initiatives. Conference

evaluations suggest that overall participant support did not rise significantly after conference attendance. As Table 6 shows, this was possibly because respondents were already very supportive of family-friendly initiatives prior to the conference.

**TABLE 6: Average agreement**

Agreement that family-friendly policies contribute towards...	Pre-conference mean	Post-conference mean	P value <sup>6</sup>
	1 = completely disagree: 7= completely agree		
Increased staff retention	6.0	6.1	.816
Improved staff productivity	5.7	5.9	.262
Happier employees	6.2	6.2	1.000
Decreased recruitment costs	5.3	6.1	.019
Better workplace culture	5.9	6.2	.096
Increased workplace costs	3.6	4.6	.049
Increased management stress	3.8	4.6	0.109
Good outcomes for families	6.3	6.3	1.000
Good outcomes for communities	6.3	6.2	.772

Pre- and post-conference there was strong agreement that family-friendly policies contribute towards the above listed factors. In addition there was some, albeit less, agreement that family-friendly policies contribute towards increased workplace stress and increased workplace costs.

Overall, people’s attitudes about family-friendly policies were fairly similar before and after the conference, with only two out of nine statements showing a statistically significant change. Post-conference, there was an increase in agreement that family-friendly policies contribute to decreased recruitment costs, but there was also a significant increase in agreement that family-friendly policies contribute to increased workplace costs. Overall, the conference did not seem to significantly change how people viewed family-friendly policies.

**Actions encouraging uptake**

Most conference respondents indicated they were likely to take a range of actions as a result of attending the conference, with the following percentages indicating they were either very or completely likely to:

- > initiate further family-friendly discussions in their workplace (70 percent)

- > facilitate the implementation of family-friendly initiatives (67 percent)
- > encourage staff to use existing family-friendly arrangements (71 percent)
- > encourage the formalisation of existing informal family-friendly arrangements (65 percent)
- > suggest existing family-friendly initiatives be rolled out to more staff (70 percent)
- > consult with others about family-friendly arrangements (67 percent).

Additionally, nearly all of these respondents felt they had the ability to influence whether further family-friendly initiatives were taken up in their workplace.

Six weeks after the conference, attendees were emailed to see what action they had taken. Unfortunately, there was a very low response rate with only two responses received. Both respondents said that as a result of attending the conference they had talked about what they learnt with other staff members and management. They both said they had facilitated the implementation of family-friendly arrangements in their workplace, encouraged the

<sup>6</sup> The figures in this column are the P values associated with a comparison between the means in the previous two columns. If a P value is .05 or less, then the difference between the two means is generally accepted to be statistically significant, because there is a 95 percent (or greater) chance that the difference between the results was not due to chance.

formalisation, rollout and use of existing family-friendly arrangements and sought further resources of family-friendly and life balance initiatives. One respondent had spoken with senior management, then ‘workshopped’ implementing everyday flexible options into the workplace, “making work flexibility the norm, meaning a shift in thinking and in culture”. Some of the changes implemented included a desired permanent reduction of hours, implementing job sharing and implementing

working from home for a fixed number of hours per week. Both respondents had taken action to enhance their own work-life balance, with one respondent “re-evaluating and re-prioritising when and how things need to be done, at home and in the workplace”. This respondent also talked about looking at the pressure and workloads experienced by her and her colleagues, and making more use of offering and accepting help.

### 3.2.7 Conference: Learning

FIGURE 6: Perceived helpfulness of incentives

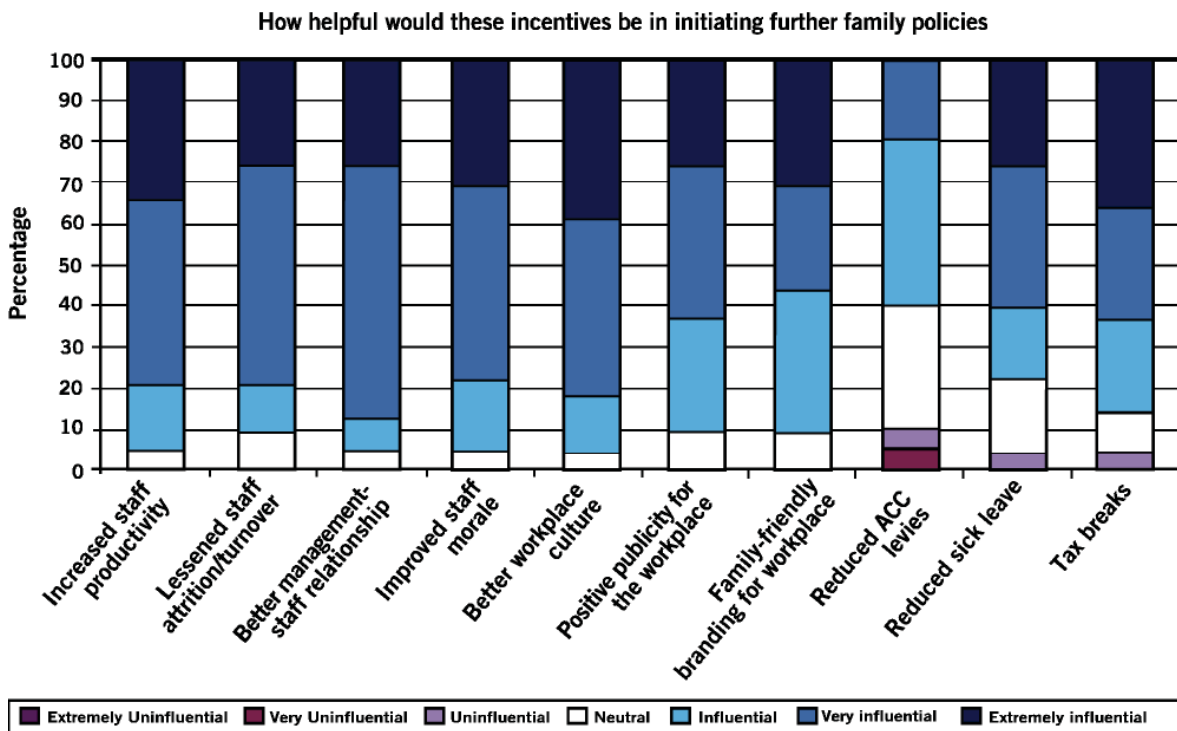
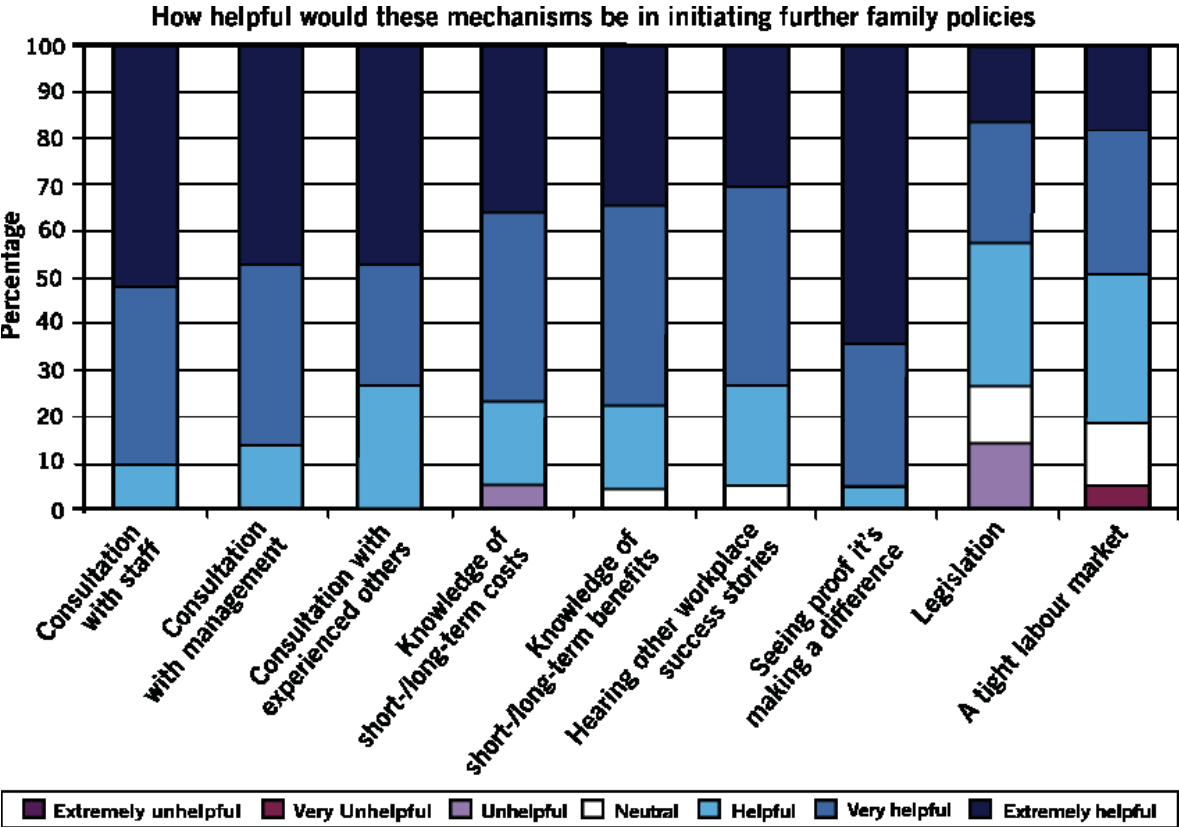


Figure 6 shows that conference evaluation respondents felt a variety of incentives were likely to be very or extremely influential in the uptake of family-friendly initiatives in the workplace. Benefits to internal workplace dynamics were thought to be most influential. Better staff-management relationships were seen to be very or extremely influential by most (87 percent), followed by a better workplace culture (83 percent). Improved staff morale, and increased

workplace productivity were also seen as highly influential followed by lessened staff attrition rates. External incentives, such as positive publicity for the workplace, family-friendly branding and tax breaks were also seen to be influential by the majority of respondents.

Very few respondents felt that incentives would have no impact on the uptake of family-friendly initiatives.

FIGURE 7: Perceived helpfulness of mechanisms



Similarly, Figure 7 shows the vast majority of respondents felt a variety of mechanisms would be either very or extremely helpful in initiating family-friendly policies in their workplaces. All respondents felt that internal consultation with staff or management would be helpful. Similarly, all respondents thought that consultation with experienced others would be helpful. The greatest support was for 'seeing proof it's making a difference in our place', suggesting hearing about successes (through stories or research) is important. External factors, such as a tight labour market and legislation, were not seen as very or extremely helpful by as many respondents (46 percent and 44 percent respectively), however these factors were still seen as generally helpful. Legislation was only seen as unhelpful by 13 percent of respondents.

**Organisational learning for PSUSI**

Overall, it appeared the conference was an effective way of increasing knowledge and commitment to action but it did not seem to significantly change how

people viewed family-friendly policies. Two possibilities arise – the conference was preaching to the converted, or pre-conference responses were subject to a social desirability effect (where respondents were telling researchers what they thought the researchers wanted to hear). The conference organiser felt that the former was probably the case. Many of those attending the conference already seemed highly positive about family-friendly initiatives – if they weren't, they probably wouldn't be attending.

The conference did not really help build stronger and more enduring links between PSUSI and employers, and the organisation needs to consider other ways of building relationships with employers, and supporting families through workplaces.

**3.2.8 Conference: Limitations**

**Initiative limitations**

With the initiative there were 48 registrations for the conference, but more attendees were hoped

for. Several attendees were employees rather than employers or those involved with human resource decision-making, although most attendees felt they were reasonably influential over the uptake of family-friendly policies in their workplaces.<sup>7</sup> Most attendees were from government organisations and not for profits rather than private sector organisations. Reaching the private sector may provide additional challenges.

### Research limitations

More respondents filled out the pre-conference survey than the post-conference survey, meaning that when tests of significant difference were conducted only 19 respondents (or 40 percent of attendees) were included. This low response rate may have resulted partially from a number of attendees slipping away early to meet family or flight commitments. Findings need to be interpreted with some caution due to the low response rate. It may be prudent to ask a broader audience of employers about the usefulness of incentives and mechanisms for uptake if using this to decide between one method and another.

Further limitations arise because the information gathered was from self-selected conference participants, rather than from a larger randomised national survey. Those attending could have been more supportive of family-friendly initiatives than employers as a whole. This could have influenced their survey responses,

such as their views on how incentives and mechanisms could influence the uptake of family-friendly initiatives. Generalising from these results therefore requires some caution, and results should be interpreted in conjunction with other research on similar issues. However, the overall message is clear and consistent with other research (Department of Labour, 2007). Respondents were generally supportive of family-friendly/flexibility initiatives and believe there was a range of actions that government and workplaces could take to encourage the uptake of such initiatives.

Despite a large number of conference attendees indicating they would take some action as a result of attending, very few participants responded to the action survey conducted six weeks after returning to their workplace. This means earlier indications of taking action need to be interpreted with caution. It is difficult to say with any authority exactly how many workplaces made family-friendly changes post-conference. However, at least two attendees had helped implement changes in their workplaces, which were reasonably-sized organisations. Potentially, many employees could have benefited. Despite the low response rate, follow-up research such as an action survey remains beneficial. It helps provide a more complete picture of initiative effectiveness, and could prompt participants to think and act upon commitments they made during the initiative.

---

<sup>6</sup> This information was ascertained from post-conference evaluations.

## 4. DISCUSSION

Despite previously outlined limitations, the Connections research clearly shows that families can be supported through different initiatives that aim to strengthen relationships between them and schools and workplaces. One of the key recommendations from national research into youth health and wellbeing was that “parents should be supported in providing the time required to raise healthy youth” (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003, p. 40). Connections showed how schools and workplaces could play a part in enabling families to spend time with each other. This section of the report places Connections findings in context and looks at how they speak to potential future developments of supporting families through schools and workplaces. It also contains implications for schools, community agencies, workplaces and government.

### 4.1 Supporting families through schools

*The New Zealand Schooling Strategy 2005-2010* recognises that “families and whānau play a variety of powerful roles in the learning and development of children” (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 32). Research suggests that genuine home-school collaborations can lift children’s achievement significantly (Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Accordingly, one of only three strategic schooling priorities designed to enable all students to achieve their potential is that “children’s learning is nurtured by families and whānau”.

Traditionally, home-school collaborations have often focused on parental involvement in schools. Increased parental involvement is associated with a number of benefits aside from improving students’ achievement. These include more positive parental attitudes towards teachers and schools, more positive student attitudes and behaviours, improved teacher morale and improved school climate (Sussell et al, in Hornby, (2000). Pape (1999) points out also, teachers hold higher expectations for the children whose parents are involved.

Engaging family and whānau into the school environment and school activities is not new. The New Zealand Parent Teacher Association (NZPTA) has officially been around since the 1940s, and this movement has done a great deal towards schools considering parental involvement, rather than focusing

only on the child. Most often PTAs are the parent fundraising committee for schools, and a near routine part of schools today, whether they be aligned with NZPTA or not. Because of their longevity in New Zealand society, and because schools rely on the money raised by these groups, they can sometimes become the schools’ fallback or default group for parental involvement in schools. Evidence of this was seen in principals’ emphasis on PTA involvement in their initial discussions with the Connections worker.

Most schools try to provide parents with a range of other opportunities to be involved with the school. These have included inviting parents to events and activities on camps or trips. Parents are also often asked to contribute by volunteering their time, to help out with classroom activities, or to help the school with specific tasks such as road patrol, reading recovery, swimming or Perceptual Motor Programme. Parent help is often relied on to transport children when classes are involved in school outings.

However, PSUSI workers were aware of some schools reporting dwindling numbers of parent volunteers, and that engaging with some parents was becoming increasingly problematic. Parents commonly site ‘lack of time’ and ‘work’ as reasons for not being involved. In families where all parents work, any volunteering during ‘ordinary’ working hours can be problematic. “When both parents are working, or there is only one parent in the home, it is much more difficult for these parents to have high levels of involvement in their children’s education” (Hornby, 2000, p. 3). To improve parental involvement in schools “schools may need to reconsider conventional assumptions and practices in order to build bridges to families who do not readily respond to traditional parent-school activities” (Karther & Lowden, in Hornby (2000, p. 151). Connections sheds light on what some of these bridges could be; for example, collaborating with social service agencies, increased communication with parents, running events outside of traditional school hours, accessing parents in their own communities and asking parents for information, then responding to it. Connections shows that genuine home-school collaboration has a focus on supporting families, rather than just encouraging parent participation within schools or focusing solely on narrowly defined learning achievements of the child.

As principals stated, it is really important for schools to know their parents and families. This could involve staff



being visible and available to parents so that informal conversations can take place. It may involve making a more purposeful attempt at finding out exactly how parents want to be involved with the school, through surveys, phone calls or personalised correspondence. It may involve running some school events outside core school hours so that more parents can turn up, or opening some school facilities up to community groups and services so that families have access to an additional range of support.

When principals were finding it hard to engage particular groups of parents, they said going outside the school community and reaching parents in their own settings was really useful in building relationships. The principals' view was that this informal mixing helped parents to view school staff as friendly, interested and approachable.

PSUSI also ventured outside the school to engage with parents in their own communities. Courses with young people provided an ideal opportunity to contact parents, connect, build relationships and eventually visit them in their own homes. The Connections worker felt these visits helped create a relationship based on trust and fostered openness and conversations that may not have otherwise taken place. Pape (1999), Davies (1999, cited in North Central Regional Educational Library, n.d) and Gorinski (2005) discuss the benefits of bridging the gap between homes and schools by stepping over that gap and visiting families at home. In many instances, home visits and conversations with parents are pivotal to fostering parental involvement in schools, knowing families and being able to help support them.

In line with a 2003 best evidence synthesis, Connections shows it is important that home-school collaborations must treat families with dignity and respect and add to family practices (rather than undermining them). It is helpful if 'service' responses are structured on specific suggestions (rather than general advice), supportive group opportunities or opportunities for one-to-one (especially informal) contact (Biddulph et al, 2003). Relationships between parents and the school need to be based on reciprocity, joint understandings and good communication. Connections' aims were, in all instances, relationship focused, and the Connections worker states, "the greatest success of the initiative was when levels of relationships deepened".

Further fostering relationships, two primary schools are investigating the possibility of becoming community hubs. In addition, four school principals indicated they would like to have a physical place for parents and families within the school. This would be a place to socialise, with community information available, and at one school the principal suggested a pre-school facility. Davies (1991, cited in North Central Regional Educational Library, nd) and Mapp (1997), mention the benefits of centres that provide a place for parents within the school where families feel welcome, can socialise and attend courses. These centres can also provide school, family and family support services, such as second-hand uniform sales. This type of facility would allow parents to have a consistent presence in the school, and encourage personal connections with school staff, enabling staff to communicate more with parents on a personal level. Social service agencies, local businesses and schools could all contribute and benefit from involvement in such family and whānau centres located within schools.

Victory Primary School in Nelson provides a New Zealand example of such a facility, with the Victory Community Centre being inside the school grounds. This facility came out of the principal's commitment to a family-centred approach, and his recognition that young people's learning is affected by broader factors than their school experience. He acknowledged that school only accounted for about 20 percent of outcomes for young people. As a consequence, this principal talks about enrolling whole families, rather than students, and opening the school up to the community (Families Commission, 2008). He states that it is about taking away the boundaries and seizing the opportunities to enrich, empower and nourish families. And he has found this approach serves everyone best – the young person, the family, the school and the community. Families feel more supported and this shows in the behaviour of young people and parents. Stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions have been reduced to zero. Truancy was dramatically reduced, and there is less transience – the school roll turnover has dropped from 60 percent to just 10 percent. This is a huge payoff from a small but determined commitment to do things differently.

Connections research also suggests that enhancing interschool collaboration could help support families. The Connections worker was utilised as a conduit for generating new ideas as well as bridging ideas between separate school communities. It was apparent that

some schools might be working in relative isolation, with few mechanisms for generating new ideas and seeing what has worked well in other schools. Future approaches to supporting families could involve more sharing of ideas, information and resources between schools. One idea is the continuation or extension of the *What's The Buzz?* newsletter. These types of support activities could be continued through blog sites for both parents and school staff.

#### 4.1.1 Implications for schools

Schools can help support families, increase parent participation in schools and build stronger parent-school relationships. Below, key factors that enabled schools to successfully support families are outlined. These are summarised in Table 7 at the conclusion of the report. More specific suggestions that could be useful for schools have been collated from an analysis of the research material and literature, and are contained at Appendix 8.

There is a range of ways that schools can seek to connect with and involve parents, including providing them with opportunities to take part in school life, having family-school events, running groups and courses, making informal and formal contact with parents, connecting families with other community services and providing a place for families within the school. The range of ways that schools seek to involve and interact with families affects how supported families feel.

School principals indicated that a positive school culture was key to supporting families. This entailed having approachable staff who displayed positive attitudes towards parents and students. It involved helping families to feel valued and an important part of the school. It meant interaction grounded in partnership – involving families, asking for their opinions, listening to them and responding. Connections research concurs with the home-school partnership evaluation which showed that establishing positive relationships was an essential first step in establishing successful home-school partnerships (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008). It is also a key step in schools effectively supporting families.

It is not always easy for parents to raise concerns with their children's school. In one instance, it was only when a parent considered leaving a school that they were willing to voice discontent. Parent exit

interviews for children leaving mid-year or before a child completes primary school would be beneficial research for schools. However, this leads to a much greater issue in relation to terms such as 'empowering parents', 'parent partnerships' and 'collaborating with parents'. These terms are often used when describing principles of effective parental engagement. Mapp, (1997) discusses the importance of parent-teacher collaboration. She notes that while principals and teachers may claim to be interested in parental participation, they may only grant parents limited roles, or may give parents signals that their opinions and feedback are actually unwelcome. Hornby (2000) also notes that:

"It is only recently that parents are beginning to be considered as the experts on their children. In the past teachers have tended to undervalue the knowledge which parents have of their children. This has resulted in many parents feeling frustrated that teachers have tended to talk at them rather than listen to what they have to say. This situation is changing and it is now realised by many teachers that, while they are the experts on education, parents are the experts on their children" (Hornby, 2000, pp. 13-14).

There is no doubt that power differentials exist between teachers and parents or the principal and parents, and depending on culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status and many other factors, this differential can be very wide or relatively small. One principal discusses parents from Asian cultures treating a person with 'school principal' status as if that person were on a pedestal. It is difficult to try to change these perspectives, but some school principals and staff are doing a great deal to be approachable to parents and promote equal status between school staff and families. To build collaborative relationships school staff must embrace a philosophy which sees the structure of power levelled and shared between schools and schools' communities (Westcott Dodd & Konzal, 2000). A true commitment to partnership is required.

The Connections study showed parents valued responsiveness, rooted in two-way communication. Two-way communication allowed a sharing of important information and ideas, contributed towards a sense of joint decision-making and ensured parents supported initiatives undertaken. Similarly, the Home-School Partnership evaluation found that schools were able to more closely meet the needs of their parent community

by listening to feedback from parents, and adapting the general model to suit (Bull et al, 2008). Communication between parents and school needs to be timely, with a variety of forms of communication utilised (Hornby, 2000). Finding time for casual conversations with teachers can be hard when parents are working, as they might not see the teacher very often. Other ways of communicating with parents (for example, telephone calls, emails, weekly notes home, texting and making information available online) are worth considering. Some schools have made DVDs to show parents what their children have been doing at school (Bull et al, 2008).

Hornby (2000) states that research shows most parents prefer communication with teachers to be frequent and informal. However, communication preferences will vary between school communities, suggesting there is real value in schools asking parents about the ways they would like to have communication with the school, and then responding appropriately. Where possible, personalised invitations and reminder phone calls are well received and appear to have an impact on numbers attending.

At times parents also seemed to value the flexibility of initiatives. This was the case with parent support groups, where parents liked them being open to try new ideas. Part of the reason they valued the Connections worker's involvement was because it helped relieve them of some responsibility, and gave them a sense they were going because they wanted to rather than because they had to.

All this indicates a form of home-school collaboration that is supportive of both family and school, and based on partnership. Hornby describes the four key elements of parent-school partnerships as two-way communication, mutual support, joint decision-making and the enhancement of learning at school and at home (Hornby, 2000).

To increase parental involvement, schools could work with new partners, such as community agencies. A case study into the Pacific Islands School Community Parent Liaison Project states, "Whilst parental involvement cannot be enforced through administrative mandates, research to date indicates that interventions and initiatives designed to improve the home-school partnership have increased levels of success when the provision of social service is used as a starting point to

grow relationships" (Gorinski, 2005, p. 6). By working with community agencies, schools have the potential to move beyond merely seeking to improve parental involvement in schools. They move further towards partnership, by enabling families to access services that support them in different ways.

#### 4.1.2 Implications for community agencies

Social service/community agency involvement in schools can help support families. It has positive outcomes for schools and community agencies. For social service agencies, engaging with parent and school communities as grass roots community development has many benefits. The work undertaken by the Connections worker, as part of groups and committees, is not usual practice for social service workers. But it was extremely useful in accessing hard-to-reach families, and in supporting families to strengthen relationships. The trusted relationships established with families enabled bridges to be built between people, and more in-depth support provided to families should they require it.

Many of the positive outcomes were in relation to the transformation from a one-size-fits-all approach to one which depicts responsive small-scale community development.

Connections took many forms within the schools in which it was engaged. Some of the schools chose to use the Connections worker as a catalyst for new ideas, or a prompt to consider new ways to involve and communicate with their school communities. In other schools, the Connections worker played an active participatory role in existing groups for school families. The worker encouraged the members to look for opportunities to engage other school families, support existing members by accessing organisations that can help and encouraging intergroup friendships. The Connections worker also facilitated programmes within schools, often aimed at the students, but always incorporating families and encouraging positive and strong relationships. Through any one of these roles, when needed, the Connections worker provided specific preventative social work and supported families through personal tough times. This was always with their permission, and with the 'client' guiding the process.

The outcomes achieved lend support for community agencies to devote greater resources towards this new way of working. This research suggests that the best

way of determining a 'service response' for each school is to ask each school community about what they would like. However, potential ways community agencies could become involved include:

- > helping with events
- > running courses for young people
- > parents or both (getting mums and dads involved in these) being involved in parent groups
- > doing research for the school
- > providing mentoring, counselling or social work services
- > helping the school foster its relationship with the broader community
- > providing after-school care
- > anything that helps school to communicate with parents (for example, helping with phone updates, reminder phone calls about events or upcoming assemblies that their children are taking part or receiving awards in or compiling/distributing calendars or newsletters).

#### 4.1.3 Implications for government and policy

As previously discussed, in 2005 the Ministry of Education identified "children's learning being nurtured by families and family" as one of its three strategic schooling priorities (Ministry of Education, 2005). More recently, supporting parenting was identified as contributing towards many of the Ministry's priority outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2009). At the 2009 Taumata Whanonga, the important role families play in outcomes for young people and the role of a positive school culture were acknowledged.

Ongoing acknowledgement of the roles played by families and other broader community organisations in young people's learning and development is crucial, because it provides the basis for collaboration between various different parties in the community. It is the acknowledgement of this interdependence, the need to all support each other that creates a reason and a place for families and community organisations within the school.

Dedicated resources could be devoted for schools to work with families. A space could be created for families within each school. In addition, formal measurable outcomes could be developed around related concepts in order to recognise the importance of supporting families. These outcomes would clarify

what is to be achieved. They would also enable the effective assessment of interventions and provide feedback to organisations about how families are doing. Outcomes also encourage reflection and accountability. However, as outlined in *Respectful Schools*,

"Assessing the impact of change in practice on outcomes for schools has been difficult. In part, this is because relatively little data exists allowing comparisons over time for schools and, in part, because some of the critical goals of the changes are not being measured either because they are not seen as relevant to school achievement or because they are difficult to measure" (Buckley & Maxwell, 2007, p. 23).

The authors go on to suggest a range of evaluation criteria which could be used to monitor school performance. Connections adds its voice of support for broadened performance/outcomes reporting for schools, on the proviso that schools are supported to provide such information.

One suggested indicator of performance involves monitoring parental involvement (Buckley & Maxwell, 2007). While this would be useful, outcomes should determine the quality of people's experience in addition to numbers participating. Assessing student and family satisfaction with school would be useful. As West-Burnham and Otero (2004) write, in their examination of educational leadership and social capital, "In schools we have too long associated success only with achievement when success in life is more associated with both satisfaction and achievement" (p. 11). Although schools are currently under no obligation to actively survey and report on the satisfaction of students, families and staff, some schools are doing this. *Respectful Schools* concluded that "regular surveys of students, families and staff were one of the most effective methods being used for internal review and analysis" (Buckley & Maxwell, 2007, p. 24). The Education Review Office also suggested that schools should regularly seek feedback from students through anonymous surveys (Education Review Office, 2007). Schools need to be provided with the tools to do such monitoring. Internet or paper-based surveys could be provided to schools, similar to how the student engagement survey is currently offered to schools, but free of charge. Ideally, schools would be provided with the opportunity to adapt the survey if they wanted to ask their own questions.

Another promising approach to help schools more effectively support families relates to fostering staff relationships skills. Connections research suggests incorporating 'learning about relationships' into teachers' training and staff professional development would be beneficial for both schools and families. Other research also suggests professional development for school staff around relationship building would be useful (Brooking, 2007; Henderson & Raimondo, 2001; Hornby, 2000). A greater emphasis on positive relationships within schools could also encourage student engagement and help teachers manage classroom behaviour. In the long term, societal dividends could include increased rates of educational achievement, decreased poverty (associated with educational underachievement) and decreased crime, as youth crime is associated with young people not being in school (Claridge, 2005).

Supporting families through schools has long-term benefits that extend beyond the education sector. However, as the *Social Outcomes Briefing* highlighted,

Although parents are critical to their children's immediate and long-term wellbeing no agency has a clear leadership role in working alongside parents to promote their understanding of their children's educational, physical and emotional needs and to help prevent child neglect, serious behavioural problems and educational disengagement. Conversely once those poor outcomes are clearly manifested – in the shape of unemployment, youth offending and child maltreatment – there is clear agency leadership. By this stage however, changing the path of the problem is both more difficult and more costly. (Social Sector Forum, 2008, p. 17).<sup>8</sup>

The briefing goes on to outline how current budget and accountability practices make it difficult to secure funding for preventative initiatives supporting family wellbeing and child development. These include the costs often sitting within one portfolio, but benefits being spread across many, and costs being immediate but benefits often medium to long term. These obstacles provide a major barrier to organisations working effectively to support families. Strategic commitments for collaboration between government departments, and to work in partnership with community organisations, are required to overcome these barriers.

#### 4.1.4 Relationship between school and work

A number of findings in the school and workplace streams of Connections related to the interplay between lack of time and work, which in turn impacted upon schools.

Rua School survey results clearly stated that lack of time and work were major barriers to parental involvement in schools, and children were well aware of this. Discussion with principals confirmed that parental availability for school involvement is highly affected by work.

Despite this, parents did not want the Connections worker approaching their employer on their behalf, to ask for parents' time off work to be involved in school. These findings are in keeping with other research that shows many parents are uncomfortable approaching their employers about work conditions on an individual basis. This indicates future approaches to effecting change in the workplace might need to start by approaching employers directly, rather than accessing workplaces through employees.

The implementation of Family Leave at PSUSI showed that positive changes to workplace policy do affect parental involvement in schools. Despite not being directed to use Family Leave to be with children in schools, 34 percent of Family Leave users used it to be with family within the school setting. Qualitative comments from parents indicated they enjoyed being able to take part in this aspect of their child's life and that family and parents' school relationships were enhanced during this time. Comments from children indicate they appreciated their parents having Family Leave. Rua School children also said they liked their parents coming to school, and many expressed a desire for their parents to be more involved in their school life.

## 4.2 Supporting families through workplaces

Well-functioning families are the cornerstones of a healthy society, and for families with working parents, workplaces are critical to family life. A key message from this research is that workplaces can play a vital role in supporting families.

The benefits that conference participants perceived to be associated with family-friendly workplaces are real. The response to Family Leave in PSUSI shows Family

<sup>8</sup> The *Social Outcomes Briefing* was prepared on behalf of the Social Sector Forum of Chief Executives of the Ministries of Health, Education, Social Development and Justice to provide joint advice for incoming Ministers in 2008.



Leave creates a win-win outcome for both employers and families. For relatively small investment employers can improve their standing and relationships with their employees, and provide tangible support for families. Employees felt more connected to their families, and family members felt more cared about and supported. People of all ages enjoyed the chance to have family time together, and employees said Family Leave enabled them to enjoy things with their family they would have otherwise missed out on.

Although this evaluation was specific to Family Leave, the literature suggests other types of family-friendly initiatives, allowing employee flexibility over working hours could provide similar benefits. For example, Families Commission research shows employed family members relate flexible work arrangements with more opportunities to spend quality time with family, families feeling closer, being able to attend events and activities, helping children to feel happy and secure and a less pressured and stressful family life (Zodgekar & Fursman, 2008).

Family Leave does celebrate the importance of families by its name and purpose. As such, it provides a unique recognition of the fundamental importance of families to a well functioning society. Because of its flexibility, Family Leave differs from other, more traditional and legally defined forms of leave, such as sick leave, annual leave and time-in-lieu. Employee's comments reflected this, and an appreciation that they were still paid while spending quality time with their family. This indicated there is interplay between social and economic considerations. Overall, it appears Family Leave has unique benefits, and can legitimately co-exist alongside other traditional forms of leave and flexible working hours.

Family Leave also resulted in benefits for management and the organisation. Staff reported feeling more positive about their employer, more connected to the organisation, more valued and more satisfied in their work. Better staff relationships permeated the workplace, contributing towards a more positive staff culture. Although many of these things are 'intangible' they are nonetheless worth celebrating, and are likely to have long-term benefits for the organisation. In line with general research on work life and productivity (Working Families, 2005), staff respondents felt that Family Leave helped them be more productive. Statistical data such as increases in both the number of clients and

client satisfaction, back this up. Other studies have similarly found that workplace flexibility is a win-win solution, with employers benefiting from "increased staff loyalty, higher productivity from higher morale, retention of skills and the willingness of staff to go the extra mile in return" (McPherson, 2006, p. 7). As Phil Reilly, the CEO of Business New Zealand, has said, "Plenty of evidence suggests it is possible to offer this (flexibility) without losing efficiency and employers who introduce flexible and family-friendly work policies usually find the benefits of reduced absenteeism and more positive employee attitudes far outweigh any administrative costs" (Business New Zealand, 2007, p. 1).

The Family Leave evaluation showed that when this family-friendly initiative was implemented in just one workplace it impacted upon many people. Those receiving some benefit from Family Leave included employers, employees, their immediate family, their extended family, friends, sports clubs, schools, healthcare providers and even other workplaces. It is a highly efficient way of supporting families. Similarly, the implementation of new initiatives in just two workplaces after the conference could support a large number of families. It is therefore worthwhile devoting significant resources to encouraging the uptake of family-friendly initiatives by employers and employees.

There are two aspects to the family-friendly workplace debate that warrant further discussion. There is growing acceptance that workplaces themselves should be more family-friendly in order to adjust to changing labour force patterns, and to accommodate the preference of workers. However, this move occurs within the context of a broader debate less voiced. If, as many people theoretically agree, 'the best gift you can give a child is time', why do we spend increasingly less time with our families, and more time at work? To what extent should economics define our caring commitments, because for many people financial necessity is a key driver of their care-working decisions. As Pocock (2003) suggests, at times a rethink of a consumption culture may be called for. High consumption might necessitate incurring debt or working longer hours, and these things might impact on other family members. Time, like money, is a limited resource. As one father reported in EEO Trust 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 be part of their lives” (EEO Trust, 2003b, p. 3).

Thought could be given to the costs and benefits of a shorter working week, with government playing an active role in regulating reasonable working hours (Department of Labour, 2004) and government providing real choices about working, by providing better support for non-working as well as working parents (McPherson, 2006). This means ensuring parents who do not work have access to adequate income.

Pocock (2003) contains many suggestions of how society can support elements of a new work/care regime, including comprehensive suggestions of measures that can be taken to encourage or mandate reduced hours of work, a secure part-time workforce, reducing the casualised workforce, changing leave provisions, reforming care provisions, workplace changes, changing payments to families and encouraging changes in norms such as concepts of community, consumption, the division of domestic work and unpaid care and the cultures of motherhood and fatherhood.

There will always be a large portion of the population who do choose to work, and a number of positive benefits are associated with working. This study lends weight to other studies that suggest government can support families by supporting employers who in turn provide support for parents (McPherson, 2006).

So what could influence the uptake of family-friendly initiatives? Conference findings shed some light on this, although further large-scale research exploring employers’ views would be useful. The conference findings suggest there is a range of levers available to encourage family-friendly policies in the workplace. Many organisations (such as the EEO Trust, DOL) currently play a useful role in providing employers with the information and tools they need to implement family-friendly policies. However, conference feedback and current uptake levels of family-friendly initiatives tell us providing information resources may not be enough.

Conference attendees felt that activities based in their own workplaces would be most helpful in creating family-friendly workplaces. All participants identified consultation with staff, consultation with management, organisational consultation with experienced others and seeing proof that it is making a difference in their

workplaces, were helpful mechanisms for furthering the adoption of family-friendly initiatives in their workplace. Other research also found that employees and employers may benefit from more active and external support from external companies, employer organisations or outside advocacy and mediation-type services (Department of Labour, 2007). This indicates a preference for tailor-made workplace-specific processes and selection of initiatives, with associated research. Currently the EEO Trust provides one-on-one advice on a small scale for businesses and provides some assistance to employers (particularly members) in introducing and managing proven EEO thinking and practices. However the uptake of family-friendly policies could be increased if a more in-depth individualised consultancy service was free, publicised and widely available, enabling all businesses to access the service.

The service could provide free individualised advice, encouragement towards implementation and link workplaces with appropriate tools and resources. If requested, it could also help staff measure the costs and benefits associated with implementing such policies, including canvassing staff feedback and ‘intangibles’ and calculating statistical organisational data.<sup>9</sup> Similar input has previously been one-off funded by the DOL through the Workplace Project. This action research initiative selected a mix of 14 public and private enterprises to receive consultancy services and a range of other support in undertaking a range of work-life balance projects (incorporating family-friendly initiatives such as hours of work, shift and leave provisions) that would be of benefit to them (Innovation and Systems Ltd, 2008).

Such a service may well (with adequate funding support) sit within an existing employer organisation.

Future initiatives aimed at increasing employers’ knowledge could benefit from focusing on the areas that conference participants indicated they knew least about, such as how to overcome the challenges to family-friendly workplaces. Research indicates the challenges include communication problems, identifying and selecting key personnel, a lack of commitment and support from management, continuity of commitment, a lack of time and resources to initiate or implement new policies, implementation issues, a narrow focus of what constitutes work life, a lack of interest or resistance from staff, meeting clients’

<sup>9</sup> Currently the EEO Trust Work Life survey is a useful tool for business reflection, although data including staff voices and information about intangible benefits may also be beneficial.

needs, heavy workloads, covering absent staff and the need for equitable provisions for all staff (EEO Trust, 2006; Innovation and Systems Ltd, 2008). In addition, employers have said barriers include work demands (such as the timing and nature of their work), complexity and expense (Department of Labour, 2006b). Employees identify deadlines and schedules, the type of work, the number of hours, expectation and attitudes of manager and other staff amongst the factors that make work-life balance harder (Department of Labour, 2006b).

Future initiatives with audiences aimed at changing attitudes to increase support for family-friendly policies might not be best served by holding a conference, as few non-supporters are likely to attend. The conference also had a relatively low attendance from the traditional business community, or private employers, with many attendees coming from NGOs or local or central government institutions. More general social marketing initiatives may be a better way of encouraging attitudinal changes to generate further support for family-friendly initiatives. Working with key influencers in the business sector also holds promise.

Benefits to internal workplace dynamics (ie, staff morale, workplace culture and inter-staff relationships), were seen as providing the greatest incentive to implement family-friendly policies, alongside the more traditionally mentioned incentives such as increased productivity and reduced staff turnover. Social marketing or publicity aimed at increasing the uptake of family-friendly initiatives could emphasise these benefits. Family Leave evaluation data show all these benefits – with staff attributing feeling more valued, more supported and more positive about the organisation to Family Leave. Staff productivity was seen to increase as a result, while staff turnover decreased.

#### 4.2.1 Workplace: Implications for workplaces

When employers support families socially, without compromising them economically, there are great gains to be had for employees and employers.

There is a variety of ways workplaces, or employers, can support families:

- > providing flexible work practices, such as compressed working week, flexible hours, part-time work, term-time working, time banking, staged return to leave from parental leave, tele-working and time-in-lieu, and the ability to leave if an emergency arises

- > providing Family Leave
- > supporting remote working or work from home when this suits employees, including resourcing them appropriately to do so
- > enabling staff to stay in contact with their family where necessary when at work
- > providing after-school or holiday programmes, or subsidising employees' access to these
- > making children welcome at work when necessary, and providing space and resources for family members to be at workplaces (for example, after school)
- > providing family-orientated social events
- > breastfeeding support
- > discouraging a 'long hours' work culture
- > promoting employee and family wellbeing, through providing or subsidising services, such as counselling, the gym, healthcare, stress management activities
- > other additional forms of leave, such as additional sick leave, annual leave or bereavement/tangihana leave
- > providing parenting and childcare information and resources, or facilitating access to these services through community agencies
- > information and training on workplace wellbeing initiatives for staff and management
- > collecting information about outcomes associated with family-friendly workplaces so the costs and benefits of these initiatives are openly recognised.

#### Enabling successful support

It is important to revisit the factors that enabled Family Leave to support families. A summary of these factors is provided in Table 7 at the conclusion of this report.

A supportive workplace culture was key to supporting families, and could help explain the significant improvement in work-life balance attributed to Family Leave. Other research suggests, "Where projects have affected the overall quality of the work experience and touched on the organisation of work, small changes were often capable of achieving significant improvements in work-life balance. Selecting the 'right' project together with building key manager support for it are clearly fundamental requirements for success". (Innovation and Systems Ltd, 2008 p. 7).

In addition to a positive workplace culture, management support is crucial because, “a strategy to encourage work-life balance or a series of work-life initiatives is not sufficient to increase discretionary effort or employee engagement. Work-life balance must be supported and encouraged at all levels of the organisation, including senior management, line managers and all staff” (McPherson, 2007 p. 29).

Another component crucial to the successful implementation of work-life initiatives is good communication that utilises many avenues and reaches the maximum number of employees.

It is useful if organisations can measure some of the costs and benefits of implementing family-friendly initiatives, and the post-Family Leave survey shows the benefit of collecting staff and family stories. They provide insight into the difference the workplace made for families, and supplement traditionally collected organisational data. They can also alert the organisation to any gaps in communication, questions that need to be answered or potential areas for future development. The Workplace Project evaluation highlights the importance of taking into account intangibles, such as improved employee wellbeing and reduced stress, rather than relying solely on statistical data. It also states there is merit in reporting mutually beneficial change, “even if it is small scale”<sup>10</sup> (Innovation and Systems Ltd, 2008, p. 6).

Staff respondents commented on a number of factors that they thought helped contribute to the success of Family Leave. A number of these related to how Family Leave was designed (for example, being able to take time off in some increments, having no financial penalty for taking Family Leave) and implemented (for example, the process of applying for leave, and communication about the initiative).

Organisations seeking to implement family-friendly initiatives may find it useful to liaise with others, or use the resources listed below.

#### Useful resources

Useful resources for workplaces wishing to consider family-friendly policies include:

- > a comprehensive list of workplace wellbeing initiatives, provided by the EEO Trust as part of its Work Life and Diversity awards (EEO Trust, 2007, 2008)

- > a good range of resources and toolkits currently provided by the DOL, the EEO Trust and the State Services Commission, or Business New Zealand through their websites (Business New Zealand, 2007; Department of Labour, 2008b; EEO Trust, 2003a; State Services Commission, 2005)
- > information on ways that workplaces can encourage family involvement in schools (Otterbourg, 1997).

#### 4.2.2 Workplace: Implications for service agencies

Community agencies are also employers, and adopting family-friendly initiatives in their own workplaces will have multiple benefits for the employee, their family and the social service organisation.

Community agencies can also seek to forge relationships with other employers, in order to gain access to supporting families, rather than waiting for workplaces to initiate contact. For example, PSUSI approached one large employer in Ashburton and was able to run an event in the workplace that provided in-house parenting information for parents (through SKIP – Strategies with Kids, Information for Parents). This led to a social worker being provided on site. In addition, many of the families were able to access other support and further SKIP events. Another agency, Parent Worx, conducted in-house seminars on workplace relationships, and professional development for people working with others. The information covered in these seminars has relevance for family relationships too, and can help families or lead to families accessing further support.

#### 4.2.3 Workplace: Implications for policy

Governments that speak of the importance of families should commit to creating environments that encourage and enable families to spend time together.

The Flexible Working Arrangements Amendment (2007) to the Employment Relations Act (year) has real potential in enabling workers to combine their work and family commitments in a way that is more supportive to families. Conference feedback indicated most respondents thought legislation would be influential in increasing the uptake of further family-friendly policies in their workplace. It is particularly encouraging that the Flexible Working Hours Amendment includes caring for children, adults, family, friends and neighbours, without requiring a particular level of care, or co-residence.

<sup>10</sup> The Workplace Project was a Department of Labour initiated action research project. A mix of 14 public and private enterprises were selected to receive consultant and other support in undertaking a range of work-life balance projects that would be of benefit to them.

The DOL provides the substantive support for the legislation in New Zealand, supplying the implementation tools for the Act. It provides a framework for employees and employers in the form of guidelines and implementation protocols (for example, see <http://www.dol.govt.nz/worklife/index.asp>, booklets such as *Flexible Working Arrangements: A guide for employers and employees*, and a large number of other resources) (Hughes, 2009).

The DOL is currently considering monitoring and evaluation frameworks as part of its evaluation processes for the Act (Hughes, 2009). Conference feedback suggested the monitoring and evaluation of workplace experiences associated with the legislation would also be informative. For example, it would be useful to know the number of employees who are applying for flexible hours, numbers approved and declined and case studies of the difference they had made to the lives of families.

Other steps that were useful in encouraging family time together include the enactment of the Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Paid Parental Leave) Act 2002 and the Holidays Act (2003), which reinstated workers' Annual Leave entitlement to four weeks.

While many resources and toolkits currently exist for workplace family-friendly initiatives, more could be done to achieve the OECD's recommendation that New Zealand should enhance the family-friendly nature of workplaces (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004). Consideration should also be given to developing positive incentives for employers to become more family-friendly, in order to increase the uptake of family-friendly initiatives in the workplace. This will then impact on schools, increasing parental involvement.

The Connections conference findings indicated most participants thought family-friendly branding, positive publicity for the workplace and tax incentives would be helpful in increasing the uptake of family-friendly initiatives in their workplaces. These ideas are worthy of further research and exploration. Any family-friendly standard development needs to allow workplaces flexibility within a range of choices. The standard could then be used by the workplace as a positive recruitment tool to attract staff. It would also have the advantage of giving staff some idea of which employers are family-friendly when they are choosing where to work, which affects many people's employment decisions.

Tax breaks could help encourage family-friendly workplace environments to become more commonplace. Other New Zealand research shows that employers would like subsidies to help implement more family-friendly measures (McPherson, 2006; UMR Research, 2003). A similar idea could be for government to introduce subsidies for employers that access tailored advice on family-friendly policy practices as recommended by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004). Qualitative research by UMR also shows that employers would like the Government to "provide tax breaks to alleviate the cost of implementing any service" (UMR Research, 2003, p. 11). One employer called for, "A tremendous tax break to take on board the culture. There must be some financial incentive."

Another role government could play would be to "provide independent work-life balance services that small businesses could access, such as counselling and advice on how to set up services" (UMR Research, 2003, p. 11).

Government and workplace support for part-time work also supports families to spend time with each other (McPherson, 2006). Many workers choose to balance their work and family commitments by working part-time.

Increasing parental leave to cover a longer period, or implementing a universal child allowance, could also increase the amount of time families spend together when children are very young. A recent UNICEF report, which compared 24 OECD countries plus Slovenia on 10 benchmark childhood indicators, rated New Zealand 23rd on 'effective parental leave', ascertained by multiplying leave duration by percentage of salary paid (UNICEF News, 2008). Only the United States and Australia fared worse, leading a UNICEF New Zealand advocacy manager to point out, "the average duration of paid leave entitlement in OECD countries now approaches one year, but New Zealand lags behind with an entitlement of just 14 weeks" She goes on to say, "While the trend towards early childhood education and care can help give older children the best possible start in life and boost educational achievement, it is worrying to see increasing numbers of children under three years of age being cared for in groups outside the home" (UNICEF News, 2008).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Outcomes-focused evaluation of the Connections action research initiative clearly demonstrates that families can be supported through schools and workplaces. It also shows family-friendly workplace change positively affected parental involvement in school. A number of enablers to successfully supporting families were identified. These can be used to inform potential future approaches.

### 5.1 Summary of schools stream

While Connections in schools did not provide complete solutions, it provided significant support for families and encouraged many relationships to deepen. The Connections worker acted as a catalyst for new ideas, a bridge to helping services and in many cases, as a consistent, personalised face that represented neither the school nor the parent, and thus was trusted by both. Outcomes achieved through schools include:

- > increased parent participation in schools
- > increased family time
- > strengthened family relationships
- > strengthened parent-school relationships
- > enhanced families' support networks
- > the cross-pollination of ideas between schools
- > the accomplishment of special projects, and ongoing research into two schools becoming community hubs.

In addition, other key findings are noted:

- > Community agency involvement enhances school resource capacity to support families.
- > Accessing parents in their own communities, and in proactive ways, enables community agencies to connect with hard-to-reach parents.
- > Connecting with parents and building relationships opens the door for community agencies to provide more in-depth support for families should it be required. It facilitates early intervention and crisis prevention.

Findings also informed our understanding of the interplay between work and involvement in schools:

- > In one school, parents stated that the biggest barriers to being involved in school were work and

lack of time. Children seemed well aware of this, and (along with parents and schools) would like to see more parental involvement in schools.

- > Working parents felt uncomfortable about PSUSI approaching their employer on behalf of them as an individual, to ask for more time off work.

### 5.2 Summary of workplace stream

PSUSI implemented Family Leave in their own workplace and held a conference for other workplaces, in order to explore the interplay between work and family time. The implementation of Family Leave in PSUSI showed there are significant gains for employees and their families when workplaces commit to being family-friendly in this way. Outcomes achieved included:

- > increased family time
- > strengthened family relationships
- > enhanced families' support networks
- > enhanced employees' work-life balance
- > strengthened relationships between employer and employee
- > a variety of organisational benefits for PSUSI
- > further the adoption of family-friendly initiatives in PSUSI.

Again, there were also key findings about the interplay between work and involvement in schools:

- > Time off work can affect time spent in schools. Thirty-four percent of staff respondents used some of their Family Leave to be involved in their child's/ grandchild's school.
- > Implementing Family Leave provided opportunities for strengthening parent-school relationships, and qualitative comments from staff respondents indicate that some relationships (with school staff and other parents) were enhanced.

The 'It's About Time' conference aimed to increase support for family-friendly initiatives in the workplace. However, no significant increase in support was reported. This might have been because attendees were already strongly supportive of family-friendly initiatives. Conference outcomes achieved included:

- > an increase in conference participants' knowledge about family-friendly initiatives

- > a commitment by respondents to take action in their own workplaces to further family-friendly initiatives or discussions
- > the adoption of further family-friendly initiatives in at least two workplaces.

There were also key findings from the conference:

- > A variety of mechanisms and incentives were seen as influencing the uptake of family-friendly initiatives in workplaces.
- > Benefits to internal workplaces' were seen to be most influential, but external incentives, such as positive publicity for the workplace, tax breaks and family-friendly branding were also seen by many

as very useful for increasing the uptake of family-friendly initiatives.

The Findings and Discussion sections of this report identified a number of factors that enabled families to be supported through schools and workplaces. Table 7 provides a summary of the critical factors affecting outcomes in each of the schools and workplace streams of Connections. Some of these critical factors were identified through analysis of what worked well in implementing the Connections initiatives. Others were added based on participants' feedback on what else could help schools or workplaces to support families better. These are indicated in bold in the Table, as attention to these areas holds promise in informing potential future approaches.

**TABLE 7: Factors enabling successfully supported families**

Aspect affecting outcome	Place	
	Schools	Workplace
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Recognition of two-way relationship – commitment to partnership and supporting family wellbeing</b></li> <li>&gt; Welcoming and approachable staff</li> <li>&gt; Consultative – asks, listens and responds</li> <li>&gt; Fosters proactive involvement</li> <li>&gt; Encourages one-on-one contact between staff and parents</li> <li>&gt; Goes outside school, to parents own community, to build relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Recognition of two-way relationship – commitment to supporting wellbeing of employee and family</b></li> <li>&gt; Approachable management</li> <li>&gt; Consultative – asks, listens and responds</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Positive</li> <li>&gt; Timely</li> <li>&gt; <b>Many avenues utilised</b></li> <li>&gt; Personalised invitations via teachers of children</li> <li>&gt; Ensures reaches maximum number of parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Positive</li> <li>&gt; Timely</li> <li>&gt; Many avenues utilised</li> <li>&gt; FAQ sheets, and Q and As</li> <li>&gt; <b>Ensures reaches maximum number of employees</b></li> </ul>
Range, flexibility and responsiveness of initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Range of chances for parental involvement based on how parents want to be involved, including academic and non-academic activities</li> <li>&gt; Initiatives based on supporting not just involving parents</li> <li>&gt; Initiatives cater for the cultural diversity of parents, and diversity of family types, working and non-working parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Range of family-friendly initiatives for participation based on what employees want</li> <li>&gt; Chances of involvement cater for the diversity of employees' families (ie, different family types, geographically disparate)</li> <li>&gt; Make initiatives available to all staff</li> </ul>



TABLE 7: continued

Aspect affecting outcome	Place	
	Schools	Workplace
Resource capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Time and energy to invest</li> <li>&gt; <b>A physical place for parents to drop in within the school</b></li> <li>&gt; Support to develop outcome measures for parent and student involvement/satisfaction</li> <li>&gt; <b>Increased partnerships to increase resource capacity</b></li> <li>&gt; <b>Professional development for staff focused on relationship building/management</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Financial commitment if required</li> <li>&gt; Processes in place to ensure workplace continues to function smoothly</li> <li>&gt; <b>External incentives to encourage uptake</b></li> <li>&gt; <b>Measure outcomes to see benefits</b></li> <li>&gt; <b>Information about how to overcome challenges associated with family-friendly initiatives</b></li> </ul>
Management support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Principal supportive and leads by example</li> <li>&gt; Recognises and celebrates staff efforts to support families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; CEO, senior and middle management supportive and leading by example</li> </ul>
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Collaborating with social service and community agencies</b></li> <li>&gt; <b>Collaborating with other schools</b></li> <li>&gt; <b>Strategic commitment from government agencies</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Individualised consultancy agency to aid internal consultation and development</b></li> <li>&gt; Employers' umbrella groups, such as the EEO Trust, Chambers of Commerce</li> <li>&gt; Strategic commitment from DOL</li> </ul>
Initiative-specific factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; To increase participation:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- provide kai or coffee</li> <li>- engage parents through their children</li> <li>- ensure event/activities are free</li> <li>- run events at times that suit families</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; To increase uptake of family-friendly initiatives:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- make sure process for approval is simple</li> <li>- formalise the policy and process</li> <li>- minimise negative effects of use</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### 5.3 Potential future approaches

There is significant potential to better support families through schools and workplaces, provided there are adequate resources, and a willingness of these environments to play a role. The introduction of Family Leave in PSUSI showed a variety of benefits for workplaces and families.

The uptake of these family-friendly initiatives remains patchy, despite the demonstrated benefits and a number of sound tools being available. Systemic change, or the devotion of fresh energy and resources, could provide further support for families. Attempting to increase the uptake of family-friendly initiatives through individual working parents approaching their own

employers is problematic, suggesting future approaches will need to focus on workplace changes feeding down to individuals.

Businesses indicated their needs differ, often according to their size, the industry they are involved with and the needs of their employees (Department of Labour, 2007). Conference participants indicated individualised consultation and assessments in their own workplaces were among the most likely ways of increasing the uptake of family-friendly initiatives in their workplaces. Therefore, offering businesses free access to individualised consultancy services holds some promise.

Establishing a family-friendly workplace standard, along with an appropriate tax incentive, could increase the

uptake of family-friendly initiatives, and help workplaces to support families. In addition, positive publicity for workplaces taking up initiatives or adhering to the standard could be beneficial. It could also help other workplaces to recognise the importance of workplaces' practice and culture to family time and relationships.

The workplace information presented was taken from a reasonably small sample of conference participants supportive of workplace change. Further large-scale research with employers could help verify the most useful mechanisms for increasing the uptake of family-friendly initiatives in the workplace.

There is also great potential for supporting families further through schools. Increased activity by community agencies proactively involving themselves in school communities would be beneficial. Some community agencies and schools might be able to take up this challenge without the need of additional funding. However, a strategic commitment to supporting families in schools, along with appropriate funding for every school to do so, would provide the most benefit to parents, children and schools alike.

The Connections community development approach highlighted that schools will use these resources in diversely different ways. Schools need to be able to work responsively, creatively and with flexibility towards supporting families. Therefore, resources should not be tagged to the delivery of prescribed programmes or methods but rather to outcomes that are successful

for individual schools and families. In addition, principals' comments suggest this resource commitment should include creating a physical place for parents within the school, and facilitating more interschool collaboration and idea sharing about how to support families.

A positive school culture and good relationships between family and school staff are key ingredients in supporting families. Similarly, communication is vitally important. Schools can help foster a positive school culture, be highly communicative and responsive to parental concerns or requests. Schools can also reach out to engage with parents through non-traditional media, provide opportunities for interacting with parents outside core school hours and seek to meet with parents in their own communities. It is possible systemic change could help schools to focus on and foster positive relationships. Options include further professional development for staff around building and managing relationships, and providing schools with free tools to measure and respond to family feedback (from both parents and students). Investment in these areas could potentially pay dividends in terms of classroom management, student engagement, student achievement and long-term outcomes for students, as well as helping support families. In the long term, formal indicators (based on outcomes measures) could help schools develop accountability for family involvement and school-family relationships.

## REFERENCES

- Adolescent Health Research Group. (2003). *New Zealand youth – A profile of their health and wellbeing*. University of Auckland, Auckland.
- Biddulph, F., Biddulph, J., & Biddulph, C. (2003). *The complexity of community and family influences on children's achievement in New Zealand*. Ministry of Education, Wellington.
- Brooking, K. R. J. (2007). *Evaluation of the home-school partnership: Literacy programme, Education Counts*. Ministry of Education, Wellington.
- Buckley, S., & Maxwell, G. (2007). *Respectful schools*. Office of the Children's Commissioner and the Institute of Policy Studies, Victoria University, Wellington.
- Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, (2008). *Successful home-school partnerships*. Ministry of Education, Wellington.
- Business New Zealand. (2007). *Balancing work and life*. Retrieved 10 August 2008, from <http://www.businessnz.org.nz/file/1271/0708Final%20Flexible%20Work%206.pdf>
- Callister, P. (2005). *The changing gender distribution of paid and unpaid work in New Zealand*. Retrieved 5 September 2008, from <http://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/research-policy/wp/2005/05-07/05.htm>
- Claridge, A. (2005, 1 November). 'The truth on youth crime'. *The Press*.
- Colmar Brunton. (2006). *Work, family and parenting study: Research findings, 2007*. Available at <http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/work-areas/csre/work-family-parenting-report.doc>
- Cotterell, G., von Randow, M., & Wheldon, M. (2008). *Measuring changes in family and whanau wellbeing using census data, 1981-2006: A preliminary analysis*. Statistics New Zealand, Wellington.
- Department of Labour. (2004). *Achieving balanced lives and employment*. Department of Labour, Wellington.
- Department of Labour. (2006a). *Decisions about caring and work*. Retrieved 20 September 2007, from <http://www.dol.govt.nz/pdfs/decisions-about-caring.pdf>
- Department of Labour. (2006b). *Work-life balance in New Zealand*. Department of Labour, Wellington.
- Department of Labour. (2007). *Quality flexible work – Increasing availability and take up in New Zealand*. Department of Labour, Wellington.
- Department of Labour. (2008a). *Work-life balance and flexibility in New Zealand*. Department of Labour, Wellington.
- Department of Labour. (2008b). *Work-life balance resources*. Retrieved 18 August 2008, from <http://www.dol.govt.nz/worklife/resources/index.asp>
- Department of Labour. (2008c). *Work-life balance: Benefits for your business*. Retrieved 10 August 2008, from <http://www.dol.govt.nz/worklife/benefits/for-your-business.asp>
- Dick, B. (2009). *Thesis resource paper*. Retrieved 10 January, 2009, from <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/art/arthesis.html>
- Dillman, D. A. (Ed.). (2000). *Mail and telephone surveys: The total design method*. Wiley, New York.
- Education Counts website. (2008). *Educational institutions and their contact details*. Retrieved 12 November 2006, from [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary\\_education/27436](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary_education/27436)
- Education Review Office. (2007). *Safe schools: Strategies to prevent bullying, 2008*. Available at H:\RESEARCH\readings\bullying\Safe Schools Strategies to Prevent Bullying May 2007.htm
- EEO Trust. (2003a). *Fathers and paid work toolkit*. Retrieved 20 August 2008, from <http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/toolkits/fathers.cfm?cache=455701>
- EEO Trust. (2003b). *Fathers and paid work*. Online survey. Retrieved 1 August 2008, from <http://www.eeotrust.co.nz/content/docs/reports/Fathers%20and%20paid%20work%20Report.doc>
- EEO Trust. (2006). *EEO Trust work-life survey report 2006*. EEO Trust, Auckland.
- EEO Trust. (2007). *The way we work and live in 2007*. EEO Trust, Auckland.
- EEO Trust. (2008). *The way we work and live in 2008*. EEO Trust, Auckland.
- Families Commission. (2008). *Why families matter*. Families Commission, Wellington.
- Gorinski, R. (2005). *Pacific Islands school community parent liaison project case study*. Ministry of Education, Wellington.
- Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence – the impact of school, family and community connections on student achievement*. National Centre for Family and Community Connections with Schools, City?.
- Henderson, A. T., & Raimondo, B. N. (2001). *Unlocking parent potential, Principal Leadership*. *Academic Research Library, i*, (pp 26-32)(September 2001).
- Hornby, G. (2000). *Improving parental involvement*. Cassell, London.

- Hughes, M. (2009). *Re: Support, monitoring and evaluation surrounding the flexible working arrangement legislation*. (pp. Email).
- Innovation and Systems Ltd. (2008). *Lessons from the Workplace Project*. Department of Labour, Wellington.
- Kalil, A. (2003). *Family resilience and good child outcomes*. Ministry of Social Development, Wellington.
- Mapp, K. (1997). 'Making family-school connections work'. *The Education Digest*, 63:4
- McPherson, M. (2004). *Findings of the EEO Trust on-line paid work and personal relationships survey*. Available from [http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/content/docs/paid\\_work\\_survey.doc](http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/content/docs/paid_work_survey.doc)
- McPherson, M. (2006). *New Zealand cultural norms of parenting and childcare and how these relate to labour force participation decisions and requirements*. Retrieved 8 April 2010, from: <http://www.nzfamilies.org.nz/research/new-zealand-cultural-norms-of-parenting-and-childcare>.
- McPherson, M. (2007). *Work-life balance, employee engagement and discretionary effort – A review of the evidence*. Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, Auckland.
- Milligan, S., & Jillings, M. (2006). *Reinvesting in the social nucleus – Mairehau needs analysis*. Presbyterian Support Upper South Island, Christchurch.
- Ministry of Education. (2005). *Making a bigger difference for all students hangaia he huarahi hei whakarewa ake i nga tauira katoa, Schooling strategy 2005-2010*. Ministry of Education, Wellington.
- Ministry of Education. (2009). *Intent – Statement of intent*. Ministry of Education, Wellington.
- Ministry of Social Development. (2004). *New Zealand families today*. Ministry of Social Development, Wellington.
- New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development. *Work-life balance report – How member companies are addressing work-life balance*.
- North Central Regional Educational Library. (nd, 2006). *Three ways that schools can promote parent involvement*. Retrieved 11 December 2008, from <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa1lk38.htm>
- NZAAHD. (Autumn 2009). *Involve*, (Autumn: p.?).
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2004). *Babies and bosses – Reconciling work and family life*. Volume 3: OECD, New Zealand, Portugal and Switzerland.
- Otterbourg, S. (1997). *A business guide to support employee and family involvement in education*. Available from <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/documents.asp?rnext=1084>
- Pocock, B. (2003). *The work-life collision*. The Federation Press, New South Wales.
- Quinn, S. (2009). *A fistful of tears*. Presbyterian Support, Upper South Island, Christchurch.
- Relationships Forum. (2007). *An unexpected tragedy*. Retrieved 1 March 2008, from <http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/download.php?id=167>
- Social Sector Forum. (2008). *Briefing to the incoming government – Social outcomes briefing*. Retrieved 10 July 2009, from <http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/corporate/bims/social-outcomes-bim-2008.pdf>
- State Services Commission. (2005). *Work-life balance: A resource for the State Services*, State Services Commission, Wellington.
- Thorndon, G. (2008). *Not for profit survey*. Retrieved 25 July 2008, from <http://www.granthornton.co.nz/Assets/documents/Services/NFP-Survey-2007-2008.pdf>
- UMR Research. (2003). *Perceptions and attitudes towards work-life balance in New Zealand – A qualitative study*. Available from <http://www.dol.govt.nz/PDFs/WLB%20UMR%20Research.pdf>
- UNICEF News. (2008). *NZ scores 6 out of 10 in OECD early childhood education league table*. Available from <http://www.unicef.org.nz/article/610nzscores6outof10inoecdearlychildcareeducationleagueable.html>
- West-Burnham, J., & Otero, G. (2004, August). *Educational leadership and social capital*. Incorporated Association of Registered Teachers of Victoria Seminar series, 136.
- Westcott Dodd, A. & Konzal, J. L. (2000). 'Parents and educators as real partners'. *The Education Digest*, March, 65:7.
- Working Families. (2005). *Is less more? Flexible working, productivity and management*.
- Zodgekar, N., & Fursman, L. (2008). *Give and Take – Families' perceptions and experiences of flexible work in New Zealand* (No. 4/08). Families Commission, Wellington.

## APPENDIX 1: Rua whole school survey



### PARENTS ARE IMPORTANT TOO

This survey has been put together by the Rua School and th RuaSchool Parent Group – a group for parents of Rua School children who believe that schools and parents should be a partnership. We work as a voice outside of Rua School Staff and the Board of Trustees.

We want all parents to feel that they can be involved in the school-life of their children. We know too that you will hold many skills that you may like to contribute to the school

If you have any questions regarding this questionnaire, please contact (the Connections worker’s name).

Thank you for your time.

---

#### Which are the best ways that Rua School should communicate with you?

Tick as many boxes as applicable

- Newsletters (sent home with children)
- Weekly updates on homework
- Website
- Emails
- Telephone updates
- Home visits
- School reports
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

#### Would you like more communication with the school surrounding school events and your child’s progress?

Yes  No

If yes, please what further information would be helpful?

---

---

---

#### What are your expectations of the school?

---

---

---

---

**What do you see as the purpose of homework?**

Tick as many boxes as applicable

- Encourages parent-child relationships
- Encourages child's learning
- Necessary because the school can't manage all of the curriculum at school
- Helps parents understand how your child learns
- Helps parents understand where their child is up to with their learning
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Is homework difficult for you and your child to manage?**

Yes  No

If yes, why is this the case? Please tick as many boxes as applicable.

- Child/children don't like it
- The instructions are unclear
- Always set for busiest time of day
- Child doesn't understand it
- There is too much of it
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**How easy is it to speak to staff at Rua School?**

Very hard  Hard  Neutral  Easy  Very easy

Why is it like this for you?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Do you think it's a good idea to be involved in school?**

Yes  No

Why?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Are there any things that make it difficult for you to be involved in school?**

Please tick as many boxes as applicable.

- Time  Transport  Other children to care for
- Work  Staff approachability

Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_



**We're considering having information and presentations for parents. What sorts of information or events would be helpful to you as a parent?**

Please tick as many boxes as you would like.

- Budgeting assistance
- IT, Computer skills
- Numeracy, Literacy skills
- Grandparents as parents
- Understanding CYFS and other agencies
- Child behaviour information
- Parenting programmes
- Information on health and nutrition
- Family cooking – easier ways to manage time and money.
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**If events like this were held, when would be the best time for you to attend?**

Mornings                       Afternoons                       Evenings



-----  
**Please remove this part if you would like to keep the initial questionnaire confidential. And provide your details below.**

**If you would like to be involved with Rua School Parent Group, which day(s) would suit you best?**

Monday       Tuesday       Wednesday       Thursday       Friday       Saturday

**What time(s) would suit you best**

Mornings                       Afternoons                       Evenings

**Please give your contact name and number and a member from the Parent group will be in touch soon.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Feel free to contact (the Connections worker) regarding the Parent Group if you have any questions about the group or this questionnaire.**

**Telephone:**

**Mobile:**

**Email:**

**Finally, Rua School wants to involve parents as much as possible. If we were able to arrange a suitable time with you, could you assist the school with?**

Tick as many boxes as applicable

- Sharing information with or a student or class about a hobby
- Sharing information with a student or class about your career
- Sharing information with students about a country you visited or lived in
- Tutoring one or a small group of student in reading, math or other area – please state \_\_\_\_\_
- Help coach sport. Please state which sport \_\_\_\_\_
- Help check a student’s written work
- Help put out a school or classroom newsletter (can be done from home)
- Help sew or paint a display
- Help build (school equipment, cupboards, shelving, etc)
- Help paint (fences, sheds, etc)
- Help create a wall mural, art display, etc
- Help students work on exhibition projects
- Help students plan a new native garden at the school
- Share knowledge about the environment or environmentally friendly ideas we could use at school.
- Help create a school presentation or performance
- Share information with students on outdoor pursuits i.e. tramping, kayaking, fishing. Please state: \_\_\_\_\_
- Demonstrate cooking
- Demonstrate cooking from another country or culture
- Share a particular expertise with staff (use of computers, dealing with disruptive students).
- Help coach students competing in an academic competition
- Help other parents and families who find it difficult to be at school because of work restrictions, transport, difficulties with staff.
- Host a ‘shadow study’ for one or a small group of students about your career, business or some other organisation
- Go on a local field trip with a teacher and students
- Contact a particular local business or organisation regarding possible school interaction
- Join the Rua School Parent Group
- Help conduct and/or tabulate results of a parent survey regarding the school
- Serve as a member of a ‘telephone tree’ to help distribute information quickly
- Help set up and update the school website
- Help design a brochure or booklet about the school
- Help translate information from the school into another language. Which language \_\_\_\_\_
- Help translate at a presentation for people who may be interested in bringing their children to Rua School
- Provide transportation for school activities outside of the school grounds
- Help arrange for a famous person (mayor, sports person, entertainer, member of parliament) to visit the school
- Help write a proposal that would bring new resources to the school
- Help with a fundraiser for the school (be on a stall, handle money, paint faces, etc)
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**In order that we can contact you to participate in the above activities, we will need your contact details. Please remove this sheet if you would like to keep the initial questionnaire confidential or provide your details below.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Best form of contact:      Email       Telephone       Mobile       Mail

Please provide these details:      Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal address: \_\_\_\_\_

Names of children attending Rua School: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 2: Participant Evaluations

### APPENDIX 2A: Multilingual parent school partnership meeting

**Questions discussed:**

**Question 1 – What do you want for your children?**

**Question 2 – What are the important things your children must have when they leave this school?**

**Question 3 – Where do you want your children to be in 10-15 years time?**

**Question 4 – What do you think we could do differently or better to be outstanding?**

**Evaluation**

Number of people in the group \_\_\_\_\_

**1. What has coming to today’s meeting meant for you and your family?**

<b>Can you put your hand up if you’ve</b>	<b>Number of parents (facilitator to count and fill out)</b>
Learnt new things	
If it’s helped your relationship with the school	
If you’ve worked out some shared goals with the school	
If you’ve found some ways you can work together with the school	
If you’ve talked about how you can be involved with your children’s schooling	
If you’ve got to know people who work at the school better	
If you’ve got to know others at the school more (eg other parents)	
If you feel more comfortable coming to the school now	
If you feel more comfortable talking to people who work at the school now	

**2. Any comments about what is has meant for you, how it has been?**

---



---



---



---

**3. Would you like regular meetings like this one with the school?**

(facilitator to count and fill out)

	Number of parents
Yes	
No	

**4. Do you have any suggestions for future parent/schools events?**

---

---

---

---

**5. Is there anything else you'd like to say?**

---

---

---

---

Thanks heaps

## APPENDIX 2B: Example of parent group evaluation

### CONNECTIONS

Please put a tick in the box that best fits your experience.

#### 1. Have you felt valued as a part of this group?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not at all	A little	Quite a bit	Yes, definitely

#### 2. Have you developed friendships within this group?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not at all	A little	Quite a bit	Yes, definitely

#### 3. Do you feel comfortable talking to others in this group?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not at all	A little	Quite a bit	Yes, definitely

#### 4. Has (Connections worker name) made a valuable contribution to this group?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not at all	A little	Quite a bit	Yes, definitely

#### 5. Has your relationship with the school strengthened as a part of this group?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not at all	A little	Quite a bit	Yes, definitely

#### 6. Has your relationship with your child/children strengthened by being a part of this group?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not at all	A little	Quite a bit	Yes, definitely

#### 7. Have you extended your parenting ideas and skills by taking part in this group?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not at all	A little	Quite a bit	Yes, definitely

**8. Has (Connections worker name) catered well for various cultures and backgrounds in this group?**

Not at all

A little

Quite a bit

Yes, definitely

**What I like best about being a part of this group is...**

---

---

---

**I would describe (Connections worker name) as...**

---

---

---

---

---

---

Your name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this.**

**All responses are confidential**



## APPENDIX 2C: Creative drama group evaluation

### EVALUATIONS

Please put your name on this form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**1. I feel OK about doing things in front of other people**

Almost never  Not often  Sometimes  Often  Almost always

---

**2. I feel OK about talking in front of other people**

Almost never  Not often  Sometimes  Often  Almost always

---

**3. I listen and hear what people say to me**

Almost never  Not often  Sometimes  Often  Almost always

---

**4. I understand how other people feel**

Almost never  Not often  Sometimes  Often  Almost always

---

**5. I understand my own feelings**

Almost never  Not often  Sometimes  Often  Almost always

---

**6. I work well in a group**

Almost never  Not often  Sometimes  Often  Almost always

---

**7. I feel good about myself**

Almost never  Not often  Sometimes  Often  Almost always

---

**8. I understand other people are different from me**

Almost never  Not often  Sometimes  Often  Almost always

---

**9. I try new things**

Almost never       Not often       Sometimes       Often       Almost always

---

**10. I challenge myself**

Almost never       Not often       Sometimes       Often       Almost always

---

**11. The things I know about myself**

---

---

---

**12. My strengths are**

---

---

---

**13. I would describe (Connections worker name) as...**

---

**14. I would describe (Connections worker name) as...**

---

**15. I would describe (Connections worker name) as...**

---

**16. What I liked best**

---

---

---

**17. What I liked least**

---

---

---

**18. I would tell my friends to go to this course?**      Yes       No

**19. I would like to attend more courses like this?**      Yes       No

**Thank you for your feedback. We use this information to help us create better workshops and for research purposes.**

## APPENDIX 3: Parents' focus group questions

Has having (Connections worker name) around helped you to be involved in your child's school?

How?

What has this meant for you?

What are the things that (Connections worker name) has done that have been most useful?

How has being involved in your child's school affected your relationship with your child?

How has being involved with your child's school affected your relationship with the school/staff at the school?

Has having (Connections worker name) around helped you in your family relationships. If so how?

What would you like to see (Connections worker name) do in the future to help build relationships between parents and the school?

What would you like to see (Connections worker name) do in the future to help build relationships between family members, or help support parents?

What do you think the school can do to help build relationships between family members and support parents?

Have you noticed any change in the school/staff's involvement of parents since (Connections worker name)'s been in the school?

How useful / important do you think it is to have an independent person facilitating relationships between parents and the school?

## **APPENDIX 4: Questions for principals**

### **The Connections service**

What role has (Connections worker name) played in your school?

How has (Connections worker name) impacted on your relationship with parents, or what you have done to involve parents in your school?

How has (Connections worker name) impacted upon other ways that the school is helping support families?

How is the service (Connections worker name) provides different from other community/social services that you school can tap into?

What are your thoughts about receiving the Connections What's the Buzz newsletter? Has this been useful or interesting for you and if so how?

Would you like to see it continue and if so, what would you like to see included in it?

How would you like (Connections worker name) (or Family Works) to support families in your school in the future?

How would you like (Connections worker name) to support family-school relationships in your school in the future?

### **Schools and families in general**

How important for you think family relationships are to the children attending your school?

How important do you think what happens at school is to families?

How important is it for parents to have a relationship with the school, and why?

What do you see as the schools role in supporting families?

### **Schools and families in general**

How does your school seek to involve families (esp parents) in schooling?

How does your school seek to support families (either directly or indirectly, through services provided from others, but through your school)?

Of these things you do to involve parents, and support family relationships, which ones do you think are most effective and why?

What things make it hard to involve families or support families through school?

Ideally how else could schools contribute towards supporting families, or building quality family relationships - If you had a wish list, what else would the school need to become more involved, either directly or indirectly, in supporting families and family relationships?

How can your school continue to most effectively build parent-school relationships?

## APPENDIX 5: Interviews with young people

- > Do you feel happy when you're at school?
  - > Why do you think it's like this for you?
  
- > Have you ever been bullied at school?
  - > Can you tell me about that?
  
- > Do you feel safe when you're at school?
  - > What helps to make you feel safe/not feel safe at school?
  
- > What's the best thing about school?
  
- > How could school be better?
  
- > What's it like when your Mum/Dad/Caregiver come in to be at school things? Eg school assemblies, trips, community fair day, fish and chip night
  
- > What's it like when your Mum/Dad/caregiver help with your school work at home?
  
- > One of the things that is being talked about here at school is a community hub where all sorts of activities could be done here for the whole community. So maybe a café, or courses that your parents and friends could come to. What do courses or activities do you think it would be great to include as a part of this?

## APPENDIX 6A: Pre family leave survey on work-family issues



**Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey. We're doing this as part of PSUSI's commitment to being family friendly. We'd like to ask you some questions now, and some questions once our new Family Leave policy has been established. This will help us assess how family friendly we are as an employer, and to see if the Family Leave policy is useful. It will also provide us with information we will use for advocacy, reporting and publication purposes as part of our broader research we're doing for the Families Commission. By returning this form, you are giving permission for your information to be used in this way.**

**All information is anonymous**, we're not asking your name. A researcher who is NOT associated with this organisation will collate your handwritten responses. Please return your responses in the post paid envelope supplied by the 10th of August. If you have any queries or concerns regarding this please contact XX on XXXXXX.

Please answer all questions to reflect how you felt **before the Family Leave policy came into effect**. Remember that your family includes your extended family and whanau.

### Before the Family Leave Policy came into effect:

#### 1. Did you sometimes find that work commitments interfered with things you would like to do with other family members?

Please tick one response

- Yes, about once a week
- Yes, about once a month
- Yes, about once every two months
- Yes, about once every three months
- No, I have used my Family Leave, annual leave or time in lieu to meet all my desired family commitments. Go directly to question 4.

#### 2. What things would you have liked to be doing with your family that work commitments sometimes prevented you from doing? Could you also tell us where the event was or give us an example (eg school assembly, parent help, partner's graduation, dad's doctors appointment)

Tick as many boxes as appropriate

- Attending events or activities Place/eg \_\_\_\_\_
- Helping out at places where my family members go to Place/eg \_\_\_\_\_
- Attending appointments with my family members Place/eg \_\_\_\_\_
- Sharing an event or activity with my family Place/eg \_\_\_\_\_
- Providing practical help/care or support to family members Place/eg \_\_\_\_\_
- Being there to spend time with family members Place/eg \_\_\_\_\_

**3. What does missing out on family experiences due to work commitments mean for you and/or your family?**  
 (It would be great if you could either share a specific instance, or talk about your experiences/ feelings in general)

---



---



---



---

**4. Which of the following family things, have been the MAIN PURPOSE for your annual leave or time in lieu, during the past six months?** Could you also tell us where the event was or give us an example (eg school assembly, parent help, partner’s graduation, dad’s doctors appointment)

Tick as many boxes as appropriate

- Attending events or activities Place/eg \_\_\_\_\_
- Helping out at places where my family members go to Place/eg \_\_\_\_\_
- Attending appointments with my family members Place/eg \_\_\_\_\_
- Sharing an event or activity with my family Place/eg \_\_\_\_\_
- Providing practical help/care or support to family members Place/eg \_\_\_\_\_
- Being there to spend time with family members Place/eg \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Before the family leave policy was initiated, how hard was it for you to balance your work and family time?**

Please circle one

- |           |      |                 |                 |      |           |
|-----------|------|-----------------|-----------------|------|-----------|
| 1         | 2    | 3               | 4               | 5    | 6         |
| Very hard | Hard | Relatively hard | Relatively easy | Easy | Very easy |

**6. Why is it like this for you?**

---



---



---



---

**7. Are there any other comments you would like to make about the impact of work on family life (these may pertain to any experiences you had, including in previous employment)?**

- No
- Yes

---



---



---



---



**8. Are there family friendly initiatives/aspects that you currently value within PSUSI?**

No

Yes

- No general expectation to work overtime/long hours
  - Not being contacted at home outside my working hours
  - Flexible start and finish times that I can have input into
  - Flexible number of hours I work per week
  - Ability to occasionally change my working hours per week
  - Ability to reduce my hours through working part-time or job sharing
  - Being able to progress my career while still working under 40 hours per week
  - Being able to bring family members to work if I had to
  - Access to a phone for family contact
  - Being able to work from home if necessary
  - Family inclusive social functions
  - Being able to use time in lieu to attend family commitments
  - Being able to leave work suddenly if a family emergency arises
  - Access to the EAP scheme, including for my family members
  - A general commitment towards my own health, safety and wellbeing, which in turn affects my family
  - A general commitment to the importance of family, and my personal life outside work
  - Other, please state \_\_\_\_\_
-

**9. Are there any OTHER family friendly initiatives (not currently provided) that you would like to see, and you would USE, at PSUSI**

No

Yes, please tick the appropriate boxes

- Extra paid leave (above annual leave) that supports my family commitments
- On-site childcare facilities
- School holiday programmes provided or subsidised
- Term-time working (working during school terms only)
- No general expectation to work overtime/long hours
- Not being contacted at home outside my working hours
- Flexible start and finish times that I can have input into
- Flexible number of hours I work per week
- Ability to occasionally change my working hours per week
- Being able to progress my career while still working under 40 hours per week
- Ability to reduce my hours through working part-time or job sharing
- Being able to bring family members to work when I have to
- Access to a phone for family contact
- Being able to work from home when necessary
- Provision of remote access, or a lap top
- Family inclusive social functions
- Being able to use time in lieu to attend family commitments
- Being able to leave work suddenly if a family emergency arises
- Access to the EAP scheme, including for my family members
- A general commitment towards my own health, safety and wellbeing, which in turn affects my family
- Access to health insurance through the workplace
- A general commitment to the importance of family, and my personal life outside work
- Other, please state \_\_\_\_\_

**For statistical purposes, can you please tell us how many hours per week you work at PSUSI and if you work at fixed times or flexible times (the times and days you week can change from week to week)?**

Fixed times

Flexible times

Number of hours a week I usually work at PSUSI \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you work in any other employment as well?**

Yes

No

Number of hours a week I usually work at other jobs \_\_\_\_\_

**Are you...**

Male

Female

**What age group do you fit into?**

- 10-19 years
- 20-29 years
- 30-39 years
- 40-49 years
- 50-59 years
- Over 60 years

**What ethnicity are you most comfortable identifying yourself as?**

- Maori
- Pacific Peoples
- NZ European/Pakeha
- Other, please state \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you work in...**

- Nelson
- Blenheim
- Rangiora
- Ashburton
- Christchurch

**What is your position at PSUSI? (eg homecare worker/counsellor/social worker/family worker etc)**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you very much**

**Your input is truly appreciated**

## APPENDIX 6B: Post family leave survey



Tell us if and how it's been useful for you



We have a genuine desire to see if and how our new Family Leave Policy has been useful for you. Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey. The information you provide will also be used for advocacy and publication purposes, as part of our broader research we're doing for the Families Commission. By returning this form, you are giving permission for your information to be used in this way.

**All information is anonymous.** In response to feedback on our previous Family Leave Survey we've also changed how we ask about your position within PSUSI, so the information provided is more general.

Please answer all questions as a reflection of how you **have felt over the last six months, since the Family Leave policy came into effect.** When answering questions about Family Leave please include Family Leave you have currently booked and previously taken. If you have difficulty remembering what you used it for, you could ask your manager for the dates of your Family Leave.

### Since the Family Leave Policy came into effect:

**1. Do you sometimes find that work commitments interfere with things you would like to do with other family members?**

Please tick one response

- Yes, about once a week
- Yes, about once a month
- Yes, about once every two months
- Yes, about once every three months
- No, I have used my Family Leave, annual leave or time in lieu to meet all my desired family commitments.

**2. Have you taken any Family Leave since the Family Leave policy came into effect?**

- No, PLEASE GO TO QUESTION 8 and complete the rest of the questions.
- Yes, PLEASE GO TO QUESTION 3

**3. Please indicate the types of activities that you have used your Family Leave for:**

Tick as many boxes as appropriate

- Providing practical help/ care for my family members
- Attending or sharing an event or activity with my family members
- Helping out at places attended by my family members
- Attending appointments with my family members
- Other, please state \_\_\_\_\_

4. Please tell us a bit more about what you used your Family Leave for, such as what your did, where, and which family members you did it with (for example, went to my granddaughter’s play at school, Took my Dad to his doctors appointment etc)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

5. What has this meant for you and your family members?

It would be great here if you could tell us what this meant for you and ask members of your family to describe (either in their own words, or by drawing pictures) their memories or feelings about the time you shared together. We’ve provided a blank piece of paper at the back if anyone wants to draw a picture.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

6. Compared to before Family Leave was initiated, has the Family Leave policy enabled you to care and support your family members on

- A lot less occasions
- Quite a few less occasions
- A few less occasions
- There’s been no change
- A few more occasions
- Quite a few more occasions
- A lot more occasions

**7. Please indicate how you feel about the following statements. Circle one number for each statement on the scale (from 1 through to 7, with 4 being neutral)**

<b>Family Leave has helped me:</b>	<b>Completely disagree</b>			<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>			<b>Completely agree</b>		
a. Feel less stressed about working	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
b. Feel less guilty about working	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
c. Be less likely to leave working for PSUSI	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
d. Feel more satisfied in my job	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
e. Feel more positive about PSUSI	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
f. Feel more connected to PSUSI	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
g. Be more productive as an employee	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
h. Feel more valued and supported as an employee	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
i. Share things with my family that I otherwise would have missed out on	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
j. Care for and support my family	1	2	3	3	5	6	7		
k. Feel more connected to family members	1	2	3	3	5	6	7		
l. Feel more connected to my family's community	1	2	3	3	5	6	7		
m. Feel happier about my work life balance	1	2	3	3	5	6	7		

PLEASE GO TO QUESTION 10

**8. Why haven't you used any Family Leave?**

- An opportunity hasn't arisen
- I'm too busy at work to take time off
- I don't have support for my role
- Other: please state

**9. Do you think you will ever use Family Leave?**

- Yes
- No. Why Not?

---



---



---

**10. Since the Family Leave policy has been in place, how hard has it been for you to balance your work and family time?**

- |           |      |                 |                 |      |           |
|-----------|------|-----------------|-----------------|------|-----------|
| 1         | 2    | 3               | 4               | 5    | 6         |
| Very hard | Hard | Relatively hard | Relatively easy | Easy | Very easy |



**11. Has Family Leave impacted on how you feel about PSUSI?**

- No
- Yes, please tell us how

---

---

---

---

---

**12. If you were considering getting another job, how would any of PSUSI's work/life or family friendly initiatives impact on your decision to leave or stay?**

---

---

---

---

---

**13. Are there any other comments you would like to make about Family Leave?**

- No
- Yes

---

---

---

---

---

**For statistical purposes, could you please answer the following:**

**Did you answer our previous survey on work and family issues?**

- Yes
- No

**Can you please tell us how many hours per week you work at PSUSI and if you work at fixed times or flexible times (the times and days you work can change from week to week)?**

- Fixed times
- Flexible times

Number of hours a week I usually work at PSUSI \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you work in any other employment as well?**

- Yes
- No

Number of hours a week I usually work at other jobs \_\_\_\_\_

**Are you...**

- Male
- Female

**What age group do you fit into?**

- 10-19 years
- 20-29 years
- 30-39 years
- 40-49 years
- 50-59 years
- Over 60 years

**What ethnicity are you most comfortable identifying yourself as?**

- Maori
- Pacific Peoples
- NZ European/Pakeha
- Other, please state \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you work in.....**

- Nelson
- Blenheim
- Rangiora
- Ashburton
- Christchurch

**In your position at PSUSI, are you part of**

- The Family Works team
- The Enliven team providing home support services (eg Homecare/Homeshare)
- The Enliven team, providing other services
- Corporate/administrative support or management for both teams

**Thank you very much**

**Your input is truly appreciated**

## APPENDIX 7A: Pre conference questionnaire

### PRE CONFERENCE SURVEY

We're interested in your experiences today and so we'd be grateful if you'd take a few minutes to complete this survey. By answering these questions now and afterwards, we'll be able to see the difference that attending the day has made. The information you provide may be used and reported anonymously, as part of a broader research programme we are undertaking. We'll also be doing some follow up research a few weeks after the conference. Thanks for taking the time to complete this.

**Please indicate how much do you know about each of the following areas:**

(Circle one number for each area, on the scale 1 – 7)

Area	No knowledge					Extremely knowledgeable	
The range of family friendly initiatives workplaces can have	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The benefits of family friendly policies to workplaces	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The benefits of family friendly policies to employees	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The influence of family friendly policies on family life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The challenges for family friendly policies in the workplace	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
How to overcome some of the challenges to family friendly policies in the workplace	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

(Circle one number for each statement, on the scale 1 – 7)

Family friendly policies contribute to:	Completely disagree					Completely agree	
Increased staff retention	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Improved staff productivity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Happier employees	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Decreased recruitment costs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A better workplace culture	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Increased business costs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Increased management stress	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Good outcomes for families	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Good outcomes for communities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## APPENDIX 7B: Post conference questionnaire

### POST CONFERENCE SURVEY

And now the day's nearly over..... PLEASE HELP TO SEE IF THIS CONFERENCE HAS BEEN HELPFUL AND WHAT SOME NEXT STEPS MIGHT BE

Please indicate whether you think the following incentives would influence the uptake of family friendly policies by your employer

(Circle one number for each incentive, on the scale 1 – 7)

Incentive	Extremely uninformative							Extremely influential						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Reductions in ACC levies to businesses through family friendly accreditation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positive publicity for our workplace	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Workplace “family friendly” branding that could be used when recruiting staff	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Tax breaks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Lessened staff attrition/turnover	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Reduced sick leave	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Improved staff morale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Better management/staff relationships	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Increased staff productivity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Better workplace culture	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please indicate how helpful you think the following mechanisms would be in initiating further family friendly policies in your workplace

(Circle one number for each statement, on the scale 1 – 7)

Mechanism	Extremely unhelpful							Extremely helpful						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Consultation with staff over needs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Consultation with management over needs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Free consultations/advice from experienced others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Knowledge of short term and long term costs associated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Knowledge of short term and long term benefits associated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hearing more about other workplace success stories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Seeing proof it's making a difference in our workplace	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Legislation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A tight labour market	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Please indicate how much do you know about the following areas:**

(Circle one number for each statement, on the scale 1 – 7)

Area	No knowledge					Extremely knowledgeable	
The range of family friendly initiatives workplaces can have	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The benefits of family friendly policies to workplaces	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The benefits of family friendly policies to employees	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The influence of family friendly policies on family life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The challenges for family friendly policies in the workplace	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
How to overcome some of the challenges to family friendly policies in the workplace	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

(Circle one number for each statement, on the scale 1 – 7)

Family friendly policies contribute to:	Completely disagree					Completely agree	
Increased staff retention	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Improved staff productivity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Happier employees	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Decreased recruitment costs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A better workplace culture	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Increased business costs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Increased management stress	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Good outcomes for families	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Good outcomes for communities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have the ability to influence whether further family friendly initiatives are taken up in our workplace	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Please indicate how likely you are to do the following:**

(Circle one number for each statement, on the scale 1 – 7)

I am likely to:	Completely unlikely					Completely likely	
Initiate future discussion on family friendly arrangements in my workplace	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Facilitate the implementation of family friendly arrangements in my workplace	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Encourage staff to use existing family friendly arrangements	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Encourage the formalisation of existing informal arrangements	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Suggest that family friendly arrangements currently only available to some staff be rolled out to more staff	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Consult with others outside my workplace regarding family friendly arrangements	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Does your organisation have**

- over 100 staff
- between 30 and 100 staff
- under 30 staff

**Please share your thoughts on the workshops you attended:**

In the morning I attended workshop \_\_\_\_\_

My feedback is

---

---

---

---

In the afternoon I attended workshop \_\_\_\_\_

My feedback is

---

---

---

---

**What was the best thing about the conference for you?**

---

---

---

---

**Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?**

---

---

---

---

**Would you like to receive a copy of the report this research is contributing to**

- Yes
- No

Name (optional) \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX 7C: Action implementation survey

After the conference we asked you if you were likely to take any action as a result of attending the conference. It was really exciting that so many people felt they would take some (or even lots) of action. Only between 5 and 10% of respondents said they were not likely to take any of the stated actions.

As a follow-up, we'd love to know what action you have taken, as this helps us to think about the value of the conference. If you can take a couple of minutes to answer the following brief questions, we'll put you in the draw for a \$50 MTA voucher. As per our previous research, information you provide may be reported anonymously, for reporting purposes. You can either return this form via email to (Connections worker or Connections researcher) or print and post to (Connections worker).

Thank you!

### Please indicate if you have done any of the following:

(Put an X in one box for each statement)

As a result of coming to the conference I have:		
	Yes	No
Thought about my own (work) life balance		
Taken action to enhance my own (work) life balance		
Talked about what I learnt at the conference with other staff members		
Talked about what I learnt at the conference with family or friends		
Talked about family friendly arrangements in my workplace with other staff		
Talked about family friendly arrangements in our workplace with management		
Facilitated the implementation of family friendly arrangements in my workplace		
Encouraged staff to use existing family friendly arrangements		
Encouraged the formalisation of existing informal arrangements		
Suggested that family friendly arrangements currently only available to some staff be rolled out to more staff		
Sought further resources on family friendly and life balance initiatives		
Consulted with others outside my workplace regarding family friendly arrangements		

**In your own words, please elaborate about the any of the actions you have taken, and tell us what this has meant for you, your workplace or your family?**

---



---



---



---



---



---



## APPENDIX 8: How schools can support families and encourage increased parental involvement

These ideas and initiatives are provided to help schools that want to further foster parent school relationships. They have been extracted from Connections case notes, analysis of the research, conversations, and learning from successful events, groups and activities in which Connections has been involved.

### School culture

- > Help parents to feel welcome, ensure good signage, consider how they are welcomed and by whom.
- > Consider training or personal development for school staff about the importance of families and whanau in schools and schooling, as well as how to build relationships, work alongside parents and families.
- > Treat parents as partners, and experts on their children.
- > Make families feel like they are an important part of the school, thank them via newsletters, or face to face, acknowledge them at meetings and/or send thank yous.
- > Providing good and positive experiences of school – positive feedback and updates on children, homework books where notes go back and forward between teacher and home
- > Celebrate parenting. Some schools celebrate mothers and fathers day by providing a cup of tea and a biscuit served by the children. Children can also choose to adopt a teacher for that day. Other school help students make Mothers or Fathers day cards or gifts. Children who don't have anyone to give something to, can adopt a staff member.
- > Asking parents and families into the staff room and sharing spaces gives additional opportunities for school staff to say hello and give some positive feedback on children.
- > Ensuring parents are receiving one on one contact
- > Ensure staff (including the principal) are visible and accessible. Ways to do this include having staff on road patrol, ringing the bell, at the school gates
- > Ask parents how they would like to be involved with the school and when, listen and respond by providing appropriate opportunities
- > Providing practical support as a part of PTA meetings
- > Recognising the social aspect of PTAs and allowing time for this.
- > Websites allow parents from all over the world to connect to schools and schooling.
- > Making family and whanau engagement a regular focus in staff and BOT meetings.
- > Providing exit interviews for parents/caregivers of children leaving school.
- > Establish formal policies and procedures around effectively supporting families and involving parents

### Communication

- > Reach out to parents and 'keeping in touch with as many parents as possible'.
- > Ensure dual household families all have access to information if they are entitled to it – ensure communication reaches both parents
- > Make an effort to reach overseas parents (through email newsletters or updates)

- > Consider the full range of communicating with parents. Methods might include some or all of the following: newsletters, weekly notes home to parents (sometimes in homework or reading books) email, websites, texting, phonecalls and home visits.
- > Utilise school drop off and pick up times as an opportunity to engage with whanau collecting children from school. Consider activities which could involve children and their families/whanau at this time. Serve parents a cup of tea and some classroom baking.
- > Dovetail school events (eg assemblies or sports days) with informal opportunities to meet with school staff, workers in the school, and other parents (providing a cuppa is a great way of encouraging parents to stay for this)
- > Provide term planners for families with assemblies listed and all inter-active opportunities. Or get students to put sticklers on the school calendars they've made. Provide updates in the newsletters, and options to access such information through the phone. This way parents who work can arrange time off in advance

### **Newsletters**

- > Photos make a big difference to the look of the newsletter. It also is a talking point for families. One school had found sponsorship for colour photos in their newsletter.
- > Provide thanks to parents in newsletters, for any contributions they've made to school life.
- > Keep language positive and pepper with partnership terms
- > Assume the parents are coming and use terms such as 'see you there' rather than 'hope to see you there'
- > Some newsletters provide really thoughtful notes to families who are grieving as well as providing congratulations for family and whanau events, such as the arrival of a new baby.
- > Ask for feedback on the school newsletter as well as what parents would like to know about the school and procedures. Look for the 'blind spots'.
- > Incorporate a community focus – what is going on in the neighbourhood
- > The newsletter is a great opportunity to hear from the principal
- > Consider posting out or emailing newsletters so they don't sit forever in the bottom of students school bags

### **Flexibility and responsiveness**

- > Give all parents the chance to say what they want, if possible, anonymously. In one school a survey worked well, helped by the children's' involvement.
- > Provide initiatives provided are based on what parents say they want
- > Consider creating a simple database of parent responses to enable personalised invitations and appropriate communication.
- > Parents are great sources of information about the community and their cultures, eg where to get bilingual texts from, events coming up. Ask them and utilise their knowledge.
- > Valuing culture and looking at cultural approaches to access families – translators for newsletters and at meetings. Introduce families of same cultures.
- > Provide culturally appropriate resources, eg take-home reading books in the primary language spoken at home, or bilingual texts
- > Celebrating cultures with cultural events eg Matariki, Chinese New Year as well as the many cultures of schools combined eg international garden



### **Range of activities/ chance for involvement**

- > Provide a mix of activities, events, groups and courses as they tend to reach different groups of parents and provide opportunities for different levels of involvement.
- > Provide academic and non academic focused activities eg sports, class get-togethers.
- > Consider events/activities that break down staff/parents power differentials
- > Create joint goals with families surrounding their education, well being and future – ask families or hold meetings with 'home-school partnership' terms on invitations.
- > Student led conferences are great ways to consider joint goals and student progress

### **Technical factors – how things are provided**

- > Utilise children to encourage parents, eg children's involvement in the event and/or organising the event, designing and giving invites out.
- > Food is a wonderful addition to any event or meeting with families! Umu or hangi events have been well attended and received, events could offer food from a variety of cultures
- > If possible, allow parents to bring other children along. If they can't be involved provide alternative entertainment and childcare for them.

### **Leadership and management buy in**

- > Principal commitment, guidance, support and role modelling is crucial

### **Partners and adding resource capacity**

- > Enlist local social service agencies or community agencies to help you support families. This is the goal of many such agencies and services may not even cost anything.
- > Advocate to MOE and MSD for funding targeted at supporting families through schools and fostering parent school relationships
- > Ask PTAs to consider ways to engage with parents and provide events and activities to do so.
- > Recognise and value staff efforts to build parent school relationships
- > Look around other school websites to see what they're up to
- > Collaborate with other schools

### **Broader approach**

- > Focusing on building relationships and supporting families, rather than a narrower focus on trying to increase parent participation within schools
- > Going outside the school community to engage with parents and students
- > Asking elders from the community to help eg carving, reading, history
- > Consider other avenues of 'volunteers' eg older people in the community who aren't working
- > Consider becoming a community hub



### **Innovative Practice Research**

- 1/06 *Hello, I'm A Voice, Let Me Talk: Child-inclusive mediation in family separation*, Jill Goldson, December 2006.
- 2/08 *Growing Research in Practice (GRIP) – An innovative partnership model*, Neil Lunt, Christa Fouché and Deborah Yates, January 2008.
- 3/08 *Engaging Māori Whānau – Evaluation of a targeted parenting programme*, Heather Gifford and Gill Pirikahu, May 2008.
- 4/09 *The Spinafex Effect – Developing a theory of change for communities*, Kathryn Handley, Sheryll Horn, Ripeka Kaipuke, Bruce Maden, Elizabeth Maden, Barbara Stuckey, Robyn Munford and Jackie Sanders, February 2009.
- 5/09 *Pathways Through Parental Separation: The experiences of a group of non-resident fathers*, David Mitchell and Philip Chapman, June 2009.
- 6/09 *Living with Chronic Illness: Support for family members who live with heart failure*, Dr Lisa Whitehead, October 2009.

This report is available on the Commission's website [www.nzfamilies.org.nz](http://www.nzfamilies.org.nz) or contact the Commission to request copies.

Families Commission  
PO Box 2839  
Wellington 6140  
Telephone: 04 917 7040  
Email: [enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz](mailto:enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz)



# **families** commission kōmihana ā **whānau**

➤ Giving New Zealand families a voice *Te reo o te whānau*

#### **Wellington office**

Public Trust Building, Level 6  
117-125 Lambton Quay  
PO Box 2839, Wellington 6140  
Phone 04 917 7040  
Fax 04 917 7059

#### **Auckland office**

Level 5, AMI House  
63 Albert Street, Auckland 1010  
Phone 09 985 4106

#### **Email**

[enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz](mailto:enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz)

#### **Commission website**

[www.nzfamilies.org.nz](http://www.nzfamilies.org.nz)

#### **The Couch website**

[www.thecouch.org.nz](http://www.thecouch.org.nz)