



# Family-centred Communities: The role of local government

## Introduction

In 2009 the Families Commission and Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) recognised the key role local government has in influencing and enhancing outcomes for families' wellbeing in their communities. While acknowledging the challenges councils face in bringing life to community outcomes and expectations, we also saw a great opportunity to explore ways of putting families at the very centre of this work.

A number of councils were invited to form a peer learning cluster. Each council selected an initiative from their own work programme which incorporated an action research approach. (Appendix One)

This resource presents some of what we learnt during this exploration. It provides insights to inform a wide range of activities, services and supports within local government.

We hope that this resource will provoke and support councils as well as other community leaders and 'change-makers' to explore different ways of working. Ways that put families at the centre and that recognise that what is good for families is generally good for the neighbourhoods they live in and their communities.

## Why families?

Families sit at the heart of our communities and our society generally. All too often however, they are taken for granted and it is assumed that what works for us as individuals, as employees, as old people or as children will also work for us as members of a family or whānau.<sup>1</sup>

In this work we have tried to focus our thinking on families as an entity; not as a collection of individuals. In this sense it is the overall wellbeing of the family that is important. If we are thinking about building a park, the provision (and location) of early-childhood centres or public transport arrangements, we need to think about how these will impact on families' ability to function as a family, to spend time together, to connect and to balance the competing demands on their time. Thinking about the dynamics of family can be seen as part of thinking about a broad and inclusive perspective of wellbeing.

This focus also leads us to be clear that family **functioning** is more important than the **form** that the family takes. Families are increasingly diverse and the nuclear family model that may have been prevalent in the past no longer provides an accurate picture of family in New Zealand. This diversity may be found in terms of age structures, in household make up, in ethnic diversity and in the prevalence of sole and blended families.

<sup>1</sup> Families and whānau are not the same, and the terms should not be used interchangeably. The work that this resource is based on focused on 'families' as understood by participating Councils and did not explicitly include whānau focused initiatives. **Whānau Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow** (Families Commission 2011) highlights stories of inspirational whānau. It draws on Māori knowledge, cultural practices and methods to research stories of whānau success. Informed by the integrated nature of Māori knowledge, it addresses social, economic, cultural and environmental aspects of whānau development.



In all this complexity, however, a sense of family usually remains at the centre of our sense of identity, of a place where we belong.<sup>2</sup>

What has also become clear in the course of this work is that what is ‘good’ for families is generally ‘good’ for neighbourhoods and communities. When family relationships are strong and functioning well it is more likely that the community in which they live will be healthy and well-connected. Similarly when neighbourhoods and communities are thriving, the families living in them will feel well-supported and connected to services and informal support systems. It is this mutually supporting reinforcement that makes local government a critical element in the wellbeing of families and that leads to significant opportunities that will be of benefit to all of us.

If families feel valued and supported they will want to stay and settle, raise their children, invest in the community and grow old in that place.

*New Plymouth Family-centred Communities forum – March 2011*

What the research tells us is that family-functioning and circumstances significantly affect not only the wellbeing of family members but also the functioning of communities and society generally, as well as the economy. Families carry out various functions that are critically important to society. They share resources, and support their members financially; they care for the young, the elderly, the sick and those with disabilities. They are a critical mechanism for the transmission of values across generations.

## What is a family-centred community?

As we start to explore how we can grow and support family-centred communities, it is important to think about what we mean by this label.

In particular, it might be useful to consider what we mean by ‘family-centred’. A number of pieces of work which identify underlying principles or characteristics of family-centred communities have been undertaken.<sup>3</sup>

These can be summarised as:

- ▶ family and whānau are at the centre of everything; of policy, process and practice
- ▶ work is collaborative and a systems approach across families, whānau, communities, organisations and sectors is adopted<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ practice is responsive; relationships are key and continue over time; respect and trust is built.

*If families are not allowed to define their own goals, set their own agendas, or decide upon the changes needed in their neighbourhood, the work of outsiders may well be irrelevant (Rogers, 2000, p. 15).<sup>5</sup>*

Families should be engaged in planning and decision-making processes. Families are themselves the experts on what supports family wellbeing. Intended and unintended consequences can be explored and better understood.

If family-centred principles are integral to the practice of a Council; then the following should be apparent:

- ▶ services, facilities and activities meet the needs of local families

<sup>2</sup> Richardson, M, (2006) Family-Centred Communities The Planning Process, Families Commission, Wellington

<sup>3</sup> Richardson, M ibid  
*Thriving: Connected, Reflective, Effective.* Families Commission (2011) and Action Inquiry Partner Organisations, Auckland.  
*Thriving in Practice: Connected, Reflective, Effective.* Families Commission (2011) and Action Inquiry Partner Organisations, Auckland.  
*Paths of Victory: Victory Village (Victory Primary School and Victory Community Health Centre) – A case study.* Families Commission (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Richardson, M ibid

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Richardson, M



- › the wellbeing of families and children is championed, and collaborative approaches developed that acknowledge the complex realities many families face
- › there is investment in the building of social capital, contributing to feelings of social connection, civic pride and increased participation in local community activities and democratic processes
- › the diversity of families, their make-up and their circumstances is recognised and supported.<sup>6</sup>

The examples of Council activity that were undertaken and reflected upon as part of our work illustrate the wide variety of ways in which a family-centred community approach can occur. A number of these will be described later in this report and will provide further insights and possibilities for action.

### Taking a family-centred approach means:

- › Respecting the capacity of families to identify what needs to happen to improve their lives and their communities.
- › Asking the question: how will this decision or way of working impact on families in this community?
- › Council initiatives are accessible to, wanted and understood by families.
- › Families' needs are considered through their various phases and transitions – eg very young children, teens, empty nesters with visiting grandchildren.
- › Collaborating with others locally to support outcomes for families.

## What is the role of local government?

Councils are the only bodies to have a legislated mandate to work for the benefit of geographically-defined communities; it is about shaping place.

'Place' is where you live, work, survive, socialise, eat, sleep, play, have babies, raise children and take care of friends and family.

Defined by that place (council boundary) councils have to promote wellbeing, for the benefit of all the community today and into the future.

Many Councils describe wellbeing from a community perspective.<sup>7</sup> As we have seen in this work it is important to add a family wellbeing layer too. Strong and resilient children, families and communities are interlinked. Families can be seen as the 'connecting tissue' that binds these other elements together.<sup>8</sup>

On a day-to-day basis, the decisions and actions of local authorities have more impact on families, whānau and their communities than the decisions and policies of central government, eg footpaths to local kindergartens and schools, local roads to get to work, safe water to drink, provision of parks and playgrounds, libraries, sporting and community facilities.

Families are centrally important to individual and community wellbeing. A family-centred community is about putting families at the front of council thinking and decision-making to support family functioning – which in turn enhances community wellbeing. Strong, healthy families contribute to strong, healthy communities. Strong communities are made up of strong, healthy families.

Councils have a continuing impact on families, not only through the possible impact on family economics of rates and other council charges, but in particular by having a key role in the development of the built urban form, the infrastructure it provides, and supporting the cohesion of the communities in which families live.

6 Richardson, M ibid

7 Richardson, M ibid

8 Richardson, M ibid



In 2006 the Department of Internal Affairs analysed the community outcomes in the draft long-term council community plans of the 85 New Zealand councils. The analysis revealed 11 themes or topics: the economy; natural environment; urban environment; community; governance; safety; health; education; access to services; Māori-specific outcomes; and arts, culture and recreation. Five themes were consistently the most frequently referenced. These were the natural and urban environments, the economy, the community and arts, culture and recreation. The Department did not note any family outcomes.

*Richardson (2009), Families Commission*<sup>9</sup>



<sup>9</sup> See also Department of Internal Affairs. (2006). *Analysis of community outcomes from draft long-term Council community plans 2006–2016*. July 2006. Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington.

## How can councils incorporate a family-centred approach?

Operationalising a family-centred community approach<sup>10</sup> means a culture shift, rather than an additional requirement. It is an approach that can be applied to existing and new projects and programmes. It also works across different sized councils.

Councils can support family-centred communities<sup>11</sup> through:

- › identifying ‘a family-centred community’ as a key outcome or strategic priority
- › engaging with families to find out more about actual rather than perceived needs, and their ideas for making your community more family-centred
- › viewing and reviewing policy, planning and service delivery – asking the question: how will this decision or way of working impact on families in our communities?
- › encouraging decision-making that supports and strengthens families and relationships.

It’s not about spending more money. The family-centred approach is a different way of doing planning and service delivery, not additional.

*Craig Campbell-Smart New Plymouth District Council cluster member*

<sup>10</sup> Richardson, M *ibid*, considers ‘family friendly’ instead of ‘family centred’ approaches.

<sup>11</sup> Richardson, M *ibid*, the Family Friendly Community Checklist developed by the Premiers Council (1992) Alberta, Canada identifies 12 key categories of family-centred communities (eg neighbourhood, schools, playgrounds, security, health, agencies, parenting, children, teenagers, seniors, workplaces and public involvement and support).



# Community Wellbeing

Social

Cultural

Economic

Environmental

How will this decision impact upon families?

Projects

Transport/Roading

Long Term Plan/Annual Plan

Events/Facilities

Water and Waste

Subdivisions

Recreation/Parks

Community Development





## How does it improve outcomes?

Experience to date shows that utilising a family-centred approach can bring about positive and sustainable changes to the welfare and wellbeing of families in local communities, and improve council efficiency operationally and economically.<sup>12</sup>

If you know and understand not only the community but the family impacts, then better decisions will be made.

Key outcomes for local government from taking a family-centred approach can include:

- › working smarter: by creating new partnerships with local residents, community groups and key stakeholders like central government
- › more effective and distinct ‘family voice(s)’ in council decision-making processes
- › decisions are made on families’ actual needs, not perceived needs, having explicit outcomes for families with potential cost-saving benefits
- › greater ability to ensure the lifecycle needs of families are incorporated in current/future planning of council and other agencies.

When councils adopt a family-centred approach, social and economic outcomes for families, communities and councils are improved.

*Rex Hewitt, member of Learning Cluster, Manukau City Council*

## The Learning Cluster: Learning on family-centred communities

From 2009-11, seven Councils, the Families Commission and Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) worked together as a peer learning cluster to explore ways councils can focus on families.

The purpose of the learning cluster was to work collaboratively to explore the benefits and challenges of taking a family-centred approach. Each council chose an operational initiative aimed to bring about positive and sustainable change to the wellbeing of families in their communities. Mayors or delegated elected members agreed to act as champions. A senior staff member from each participating council (and sometimes with community partners) came together to share and learn from each other about what works and what doesn’t work.

## Case studies

It should be noted that these case studies represent a snapshot in time and that further developments have since taken place.

More detailed information can be found in *In Their Own Words: Comments from council members in the cluster one year after being involved (2010)*, extracts below.

Changes to local government at operational and political levels may have had significant impacts within councils.

<sup>12</sup> Conclusion based on experience of seven Councils who explored a family-centred approach as part of a local government cluster pilot in 2009-11, see next section.



## Kapiti Coast District Council

### Community and civic engagement

This project came out of community forums leading to the Long Term Community Plan (LTCP) 2009. Community events and civic education were initiated to build community relationships and understanding, to foster communities that are more connected and resilient. Synergies with a family-centred approach were noted. Sustainable Home and Garden Shows were held in 2009 and 2010, providing a space to encourage communities to nurture healthy whānau – to eat, talk, learn and grow together. They also modelled ‘tuakana/teina’ – older people passing on their knowledge to young people and young people sharing their concepts with their kaumatua.

In addition to this a civics education resource for primary schools was developed with an intention of engaging families together.

### Key learning

The need to continually review engagement processes to make sure we are not resting on our laurels, but always asking “Are we hearing from, and listening to, people across the community – families, children, young people...?”<sup>13</sup>



13 Report from Kapiti to Learning Cluster

## Manukau City Council (now part of Auckland Council)

### Early childhood education (ECE) provision

With only 10,000 places available in Manukau for 28,000 children aged under-five, the council used family-centred planning to secure more ECE services for the city. A comprehensive approach was initiated involving town planners, government agencies, schools and communities. Examples of actions include:

- consenting processes streamlined to make it much easier to establish services in residential areas
- council staff consider if ECE services can be established in new buildings – eg an aquatic centre
- advocacy and connections with Minister (and Ministry) of Education to advance ECE provision on school sites
- provision of council land and support for community providers to establish family-focused centres
- recognising (and supporting) importance of playgroups led to piloting of 20 supported play groups with great results.

### Key learning

“Children cannot access ECE without the support of their families.” A simple statement but not one that is generally taken as the starting point for the design and delivery of services. The essence of the family-centred communities work is that families are central to local government’s planning and provision of services. However, service systems are developed which serve to fragment, rather than support families, whereas if they were reversed, as is evidenced in this work, all gain.<sup>14</sup>



14 Report from Manukau project to Learning Cluster



## New Plymouth District Council

### Community planning

Families from the suburb of Marfell were involved in planning and designing a future vision for their community. In the early stages a community champion and advocate was appointed to lead the community research. The process intentionally involved families in planning, design and implementation and put families at the centre. The 'experts' consciously took a back seat.

Listening to the voices of children, parents, families and individual community members enabled a comprehensive picture and response to be made in the master plan to support the communities stated aspirations.

The positive and inclusive family atmosphere is captured in the YouTube clip below.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjKRL-ooMJw>

### Key learning

Having a family focus through the engagement process led to more robust and community-centred information.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Report from New Plymouth to Learning Cluster

## Porirua City Council

### Are we ready at home?

Porirua City Council engaged with children and their schools to help get families and households ready for emergencies. The Council estimated that only 22 percent of households (and families) had a reasonable level of preparedness for emergencies (water, foodstuffs, first aid etc). Emergency Management staff had an insight about the role that children could play. "What about choosing the most effective or innovative communicators or agents of change – children?" They noted "Children may well be the Trojan Horse into a family's consciousness and agents of change. It's definitely worth a try!"

What followed was a process of active engagement with schools – and through that with families. Emergency preparedness plans were made (with up to 80 percent response in some groups) and brought back to be shared. In addition, schools were identified and established as community civil defence centres. The enthusiasm that this process generated was infectious and although more work can be done to gauge emergency readiness, Council was very confident that a significant difference had been made.

### Key learning

There is a gut feeling – an innate sense – that children are, and will continue to be, a very useful avenue or conduit to family and household.







## Waitakere City Council (now part of Auckland Council)

### Family-centred planning

Innovative engagement with local families when planning for new community facilities in Henderson South.

Highlights of a very comprehensive process included:

- › two members of the local community being ‘contracted’ to undertake a survey with a cross-section of families in the community
- › local families/community members were involved in making a submission to Council seeking additional funding (\$1m) to ensure the key elements identified in the survey could be incorporated
- › a DVD compiled to chart the progress of the project.

As well as very significant ‘non-tangible’ outcomes for those directly involved (including a deeper understanding of families in the community), a number of concrete outcomes were identified, including:

- › the construction of the community facility was far more focused on questions around family needs, rather than individual needs
- › a family perspective (through the findings of the family survey) were used in the tendering brief for the facility
- › an arrangement developed with a neighbouring school to refurbish a basketball court for shared use with the new facility
- › the use of community members to conduct family surveys seems to have achieved excellent responses
- › strong indications of good community ownership of the facility, and its development.

### Key learning

The process of involving families and building their trust as well as enabling the ‘technical experts’ to adopt a different perspective, takes time, resources and patience. It is about developing relationships where challenge can be accepted.<sup>16</sup>



16 Report from Waitakere to Learning Cluster

## Family-centred Community Practice: What matters

Local Government is complex, with a vast range and scale of activities. This complexity presents many opportunities to apply a family-centred community approach to improve the wellbeing of families.

A new subdivision master plan, a playground refresh, a community event, or even pipes in the ground, will all impact on families. There are always opportunities to make that impact a positive one; to contribute to the wellbeing of families and hence to overall community wellbeing.

As a result of work undertaken by the Local Government Family-Centred Communities Peer Cluster, a number of useful practice-based principles can be distilled. For councils wanting to adopt and implement a family-centred approach, experience from the peer learning cluster shows that the key question to ask is:

How will this decision or way of working impact on families in this community?

*The Family-centred Community way of working is not about doing different things, but is an intentional, purposeful focus on family wellbeing*

### Six key considerations of effective family-centred community practice:

- › understand the fundamental role of family
- › consider family wellbeing
- › engage with families
- › ask the right type of questions
- › collaborate
- › allow sufficient time to make quality decisions and achieve good outcomes.



## Understand the fundamental role of family

Families are centrally important to community wellbeing. We are born, nurtured and raised within a family context (whether this is our genetic parents or other carers). The experience of nurture and attachment shapes our personalities and values, which have a lifelong impact. The healthy functioning of families greatly impacts on individual and community wellbeing.

We must also acknowledge that families are more than the sum of their parts. They are not simply a collection of individuals, but rather a set of complex relationships that are constantly changing and evolving through different life stages. The ability for family members to connect with each other (whether that be in person or by other means) will be an important contributor to a sense of family wellbeing.

## Consider family wellbeing

A family-centred approach involves considering the impact and consequences (intended and unintended) that decisions, initiatives or projects have on family wellbeing. This is about always asking the question: “how will this decision or way of working impact on families in this community?”

By understanding things from a family perspective, initial assumptions can be assessed. While these assumptions are initially untested, they may help shape the focus of consultation and engagement that follows.

## Engage with families

Community engagement is essential to council decision-making processes, supported by legislated requirements to consult and to consider views of those affected. Reasonable access to relevant information that is received in an appropriate manner and format (as well as the purpose of, and the scope of, consultation), underpins good consultation practice. To test assumptions on family wellbeing it is important to engage effectively with families.

Engage with families in ways that are accessible and interesting, using a mix of innovative and consumer-friendly approaches (eg point of access surveys, participatory enquiry, interactive websites).

## Right type of questions

Good questions are key in determining what information is received. In traditional approaches, many questions ask opinions and views of individuals leading to self-centred responses whereby people fail to consider broader impacts on others around them. Questions which seek to answer “how will this reflect on families” enables people to reflect and respond from a wider perspective.

## Collaborate

Councils cannot, and do not, impact on community outcomes alone. They work closely with other organisations including central government, public bodies, businesses, iwi, the voluntary and community sector and local residents. A family-centred community-led approach understands and supports the requirement to work together with other partners and advocating for the consideration of family wellbeing.

Internal collaboration within councils is vital. Good family-centred practice needs the skills and experience of a multi-disciplinary team, collaboration between professionals’ groups within councils, building internal capacity, resourcing and effective partnerships.

## Allow sufficient time

Building an understanding of the impact on families involves engagement processes that need to work to the speed of the local community. Take time to develop relationships, build trust and gain access to the right people. Ultimately, local government seeks to build community wellbeing for now and in the future. Therefore, spending time up front to engage and clearly understand the views of those affected will result in more robust decision-making and more sustainable local decisions.

## The process of change – the big challenge

Sustained change is essential within councils if families and their wider communities are to change, benefit and prosper.

This often means working on multiple fronts, paying attention to readying systems to integrating a family-centred community culture into the day-to-day business, networks and relationships.



Transformational change is fuelled by innovation, vision, energy, time, skills and quality relationships. It requires resources and enough authority to penetrate established organisational structures.

What might this look like?

## Prepare the ground

- › Identify early adopters, social innovators and potential champions of family-centred community.
- › Build internal and external relationships and networks with key influencers and potential active participants in bringing change.
- › Ask: Who needs to know about this (family-centred community)? Who needs to be involved, now and later?
- › Promote and communicate existing council statements re families, wellbeing and engagement, eg community plans.

## Engage people and integrate the vision

- › Develop and incorporate family-centred community approach into a few suitable existing or planned council initiatives.
- › Bring together those early adopters, champions, influencers, innovators and key participants to exchange ideas and information, develop a systems approach and continue building collaborative relationships and connections.
- › Identify the barriers to change, and together, find how to address these.
- › Continue to test and experiment with family-centred community in a variety of settings.
- › Raise awareness through interactive workshops, forums, websites and visual presentations.

## Embed a family-centred culture

- › Expect constant change and complex situations which could potentially have negative impacts.
- › Recognise new opportunities and connectedness.
- › Review achievements and barriers to success.
- › Continue to build awareness, expertise, collaborative networks and relationships.
- › Ensure influential 'champions' articulate and support family-centred community.
- › Have broad and flexible approaches to evaluation.
- › Take time for reflection and analysis.

- › Recognise the importance of asking the right questions.
- › Incorporate family-centred community approaches into staff professional development and performance reviews.
- › Adopt a 'whole of council' approach to embedding family-centred community across the organisation – especially with policy development, strategic planning and those who implement council plans.
- › Appreciate the importance of the political role in promoting family-centred community.

## Think, like a movement<sup>17</sup>

- › Identify and build on quick wins. Celebrate!
- › Involve local neighbourhood and community leaders in telling their stories to influential audiences and potential allies.
- › Develop quality listening, astute observation and understanding of families' contexts.
- › Keep linking family-centred community back to the organisation's mission and values.
- › Expect an ongoing process of experimentation, learning and adapting, with every person contributing their best, aiming to work together to make a difference.
- › Monitor the "big picture and the whole picture".

## The Peer Learning Process

- › The cluster approach was a valuable experience.
- › People enjoyed the opportunity to reflect, discuss and learn from each other.
- › New approaches and insights were gained from the shared discussion leading to changed practice frameworks.
- › The challenges of bringing changes were mitigated by collaboration and co-operation.

The shared view of all participants.

17 Westley, Zimmerman & Quinn Patton. (2006). Getting to Maybe: How the World has Changed. Random House Canada. 272 pages. "A practical, inspirational, revolutionary guide to social innovation ... By studying fascinating real-life examples of social change through this systems-and-relationships lens, the authors tease out the rules of engagement between volunteers, leaders, organisations and circumstance – between individuals and what Shakespeare called "the tide in the affairs of men." (from amazon.ca website)



## How to get started

Gisborne District Council was interested in hearing more about the family-centred initiative and the work of the cluster, and invited members of the cluster to contribute at a forum where they were developing a wellbeing strategy for children and families. Appendix Two.

# Appendix One

## Summary of the history of Family-centred Community Initiative

### 2009

Review of the published literature available in New Zealand and internationally on family-centred communities

### 2009–2010

Council officers from seven participating councils built up their understanding and experience in applying the family-centred approach. The stories from this peer learning cluster can be found in a document 'In their Own Words' and in the vignettes of our practice produced as part of the initiative's monitoring and evaluation

In Their Own Words: Comments from Council members in the cluster one year after being involved (2010)

### 2011

The peer learning cluster received invitations to introduce the family-centred initiative to new audiences.

- › Family Centred Communities Workshop hosted by New Plymouth District Council with participants from community organisations, council staff, and councillors.
- › Victory Village Forum Workshop hosted by Victory Village School, the Families Commission and Inspiring Communities 'It's About Family – Community and councils working together'.
- › Gisborne District Council Family-centred Communities Workshop in the development of a wellbeing strategy for children and families process hosted by Gisborne District Council. Appendix Two.

### 2012

Most Significant Change technique was used to help understand the changes that occurred in our practice and to help evaluate the outcomes that were achieved. Our journey since 2009.

- › Family-centred Communities Initiative: Most Significant Change Report (pp. 20-23).docx





## Appendix Two

### Manu Caddie, Gisborne District Councillor and Lyn Campbell, change-maker Family-centred Communities Initiative:

Gisborne is known for the strength of its community advocates who are reminded on a daily basis of the damning statistics for their region's children and families.

For years they have raised their voices on behalf of children and families, calling on their local leaders, especially in local government, to develop stronger support for advocates acting on behalf of all children and families. They know that social wellbeing requires relevant family-centred policy, planning and processes from both central and local government as well as community groups. They understand that social wellbeing is a necessary component of economic wellbeing if Gisborne is to be a great place for people to stay, put down their roots, work, raise children, invest and grow old – in alignment with Gisborne District Council's stated community outcome: Gisborne – a great place to live, work and play.

In late 2011, following robust advocacy from local community leaders, Gisborne District Council made a resolution to work in partnership with the community to develop a strategy for whānau and tamariki. A catalyst for this decision has been the voice and experience of a local government politician who lives in one of the city's most disadvantaged areas, known for gang activity, social, economic and environmental challenges and disparities. He has become known for his social activism as a resident and his knowledge from personal experience, of the day to day challenges facing children and families as they face a complexity of issues.

A Think Tank on Family-Centred Communities met in December 2011 to progress the development of strong, collaborative partnerships between community, Tairāwhiti Child Protection Network and Gisborne District Council. Representatives of central and local government and the community worked together with a common vision of child and family-centred communities.

They discussed what would need to change within GDC and other related agencies, if sustainable positive changes are to take place in the lives of children and families and ultimately the whole community.

**This is a story in its opening chapters. The plan is to have developed a strategy for children and families by June 2012.**

The test of success will be revealed in the changes which result in the future because local government and community leaders have worked together, with the strengths of the families in their constituency to bring identifiable improvements to their social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

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