8 Discussion

8.1 High level of support for the programme

SWIS is a very highly regarded programme that had attracted high levels of support from schools and clients in the comparatively short period that the programme has been in operation. Where the programme was being provided by able social workers and where there was a continuity of service, undisrupted by changing personnel, then enthusiasm for the service was at its highest. In areas where SWIS was working well there was a high demand for extending the service to neighbouring schools outside the range of the programme at that time. Many schools reported substantial changes and improvements in their ability to respond to the social needs of children, with improvements in educational, health and social outcomes for children and families. Schools also considered that professional social work services allowed them to deal with issues that were previously undiagnosed or social needs that were recognised but unmet. SWIS had reduced the amount of time that principals and other school staff needed to invest in negotiating with social service providers and locating appropriate services. This had allowed schools to respond more quickly when children's special needs were identified.

For a relatively small number of schools SWIS has been less successful. For these schools the primary concern has been access to services. In some cases schools considered that the services provided by individual social workers fell short of the levels of professional availability and level of skill that they expected. More importantly, however, schools that experienced significant gaps in services had major criticisms of SWIS. Difficulties in appointing staff and resulting gaps in service delivery were the schools' main concerns. This occurred in an environment where the average annual turnover of SWIS social workers is 29%, approximately double the turnover of Child, Youth and Family social workers.

In many cases these concerns can also be seen as reflecting some of the success of the programme. Schools complained most when, because of staff changes, they did not have social workers they felt they were entitled to and valued. The slightly less enthusiastic response of other agencies may be the result of distance from the work and therefore a lack of knowledge of what social workers in schools were doing, particularly in their work with individual clients and their families.

A good many of the interventions considered by this evaluation illustrated very substantial change and major achievements by the families concerned. At times, these interventions made radical differences to the lives of these families. They also occurred with families who had deep-seated and long-term issues, not resolved in the past despite the efforts of, at times, numerous social service agencies. These issues with social service agencies involved structural relationships between agencies and families, often with agencies working from a deficit model. Positive changes with SWIS intervention went well beyond improvements within the family and they also involved structural improvements in the ways that agencies dealt with the families.

Despite these trends, an assessment of the overall impact of SWIS does need to be qualified due to the recent establishment of the service and the short time frame of the evaluation. A more sustained assessment of impact could only be made over a longer period of time. SWIS is still finding its way in many sites. Therefore it is also difficult to comment on the extent to which, aspects of service delivery that have contributed or hindered positive change are fundamental to the model and its implementation or are simply the result of bedding in a new programme.

8.2   Critical success factors of SWIS

8.2.1 Strengths-based practice

There is strong evidence that social workers were actively engaged in seeking out the strengths of their clients and client families, the schools and their communities. In doing so they were able to facilitate change where negative experiences of prior contact with social service agencies had produced a self-perpetuating expectation of failure. Families demonstrated much more commitment to change where they were able to rely on and develop their own resources. This was not the same as being left to their own devices; it required a re-orientation of the clients' and families' relationships with essential support agencies. This involved a significant turnaround from deficit-based relationships with social service agencies to strengths-based modes of working.

This ability to view clients and their families as central and significant participants in the interventions was dependent upon a strong strengths-based approach to social work practice.

In one of the case studies the social worker's ability to bring together a very wide range of social service agencies was a very significant factor in the success of the intervention. Also significant was the social worker's ability to use a family group conference with these agencies to transform their relationships with the family. Prior to the involvement of SWIS, other social service agencies' experiences with the family had been extremely negative and their dealings with the family had been predominantly hostile and punitive. The social worker's emphasis on strengths allowed this family and the agencies to reframe their relationships in a way that produced positive outcomes for all participants. This was achieved in an environment where previously positive outcomes had appeared impossible. This model of working was replicated through most of the cases. In some instances there was evidence of social workers being more overtly directive in their dealings with families. However, this must be seen as a relatively minor occurrence.

Social workers also used a strengths perspective to transform schools' deficit-based assumptions of the abilities of individual children and their families. Schools inevitably identified problems and referred these problems to social workers thus reinforcing a deficit-based referral model. In almost all cases social workers demonstrated the flexibility to look beyond reasons for referral and to provide a more holistic and strengths-based examination of the needs and abilities of the referred child and their family. In many cases the social workers' involvement with the family led to better relationships between the child and the school. These new relationships were based more on the child's strengths than the school's understanding of his or her deficiencies.

Social workers' training in and understanding of strengths-based practice are important, but should not be seen as the only driver of strengths-based work within SWIS. Much of the movement towards using the strengths-based models in dealing with clients can be seen as extending from the design and nature of the programme itself.

The ability of families to accept the possibility of positive change and to begin to envisage self-directing futures was among the most important aspects in producing positive outcomes. Families' abilities to take control of the future and to be able to envisage change were crucial. Much of this extended from the voluntary and independent nature of the service and on the capacity of the social worker to bring resources into the family.

8.2.2 The voluntary nature of SWIS

Positive outcomes for the child also invariably necessitated some form of transformation within the family itself, even where there was a need for structural change in schools' or agencies' relationships with families. Social workers within SWIS were able to facilitate this transformation for a number of reasons, all of which flowed from three key aspects of the programme. Because the families were voluntarily engaged with the social workers, the relationship was much more equal than it may have been in a statutory context. The voluntary nature of this service did not mean that all clients actively committed themselves to change. However, by making active decisions to become involved with the social workers many families were also able to make commitments to positive change. The voluntary nature of the programme also appears to have increased its acceptability in the community at large, despite entrenched negative feelings about the nature of social work.

8.2.3 Social worker independence

Social workers were able to work alongside families because they were seen as independent and representing none of the major agencies that had often dominated the lives of many of the families. While relationships with schools could often be positive, there was also strong evidence of poor relationships with schools and of families requiring someone to act as an advocate or mediator in dealing with schools on behalf of their children. This need for advocacy helped social workers to be seen as a key support to the families themselves. Ironically, social worker isolation from providers, overall a major problem for SWIS, sometimes assisted in making strong relationships between clients and social workers. Clients did not feel that they were working with an agency but that they were working with a social worker who became their key support person. Social worker independence was also crucial in encouraging structural change in the relationship between families and schools and agencies, because it allowed the workers to act on the families' behalf in the best interests of the child where change was required in schools and agencies.

8.2.4 Networking with other agencies

Social workers were able to use their networks to enhance the resources available to families. These included accessing material resources like food parcels and ensuring that families had access to appropriate benefits. In addition to this, social workers enhanced families' skills in dealing with agencies.

8.3 Being part of the schools

Schools with a high level of support for SWIS were also those with a sense that their social workers were an essential part of their schools. Many schools appreciated social workers taking part in school events, such as sports days or parent nights. They saw this as a means of cementing better relationships, not just between social workers and the school but also between social workers and children and families served by the school. This also allowed potential clients to become aware of the existence of the social work service and have a personal knowledge of who the social worker was.

Some schools resented the time taken by social workers to carry out administrative or training responsibilities, which they saw as taking social workers away from the school. Social workers were often spread across a number of schools which were sometimes geographically distant from each other. This often created competing demands by schools both for the physical presence of social workers and also for a fair percentage of their caseload. Some schools felt that they had been inappropriately combined with other schools in marriages of convenience to participate in the tendering process. Attempts to make sure that the clusters served by individual social workers have a community of interest, and are not simply an unnatural alliance put together for the sake of ensuring an appointment, need further

consideration. Schools in the round of applications should be able to show that they have sufficient common interest to provide a degree of cohesion to the social worker's role. Where this is not the case then there may well be significant logistical problems of travel between schools. Differences may be compounded as social workers try to develop separate programmes that are appropriate for the different communities they serve.

8.4   Inclusion of stakeholders

SWIS would be enhanced if there were a greater inclusion of stakeholders and community in the management structure. The varied models for managing SWIS used across sites show that there is no consistent model for including stakeholders and the community in the governance of SWIS. Some providers have management committees made up of representatives of the provider, with some social worker representation, and with representatives from schools. Other providers have no governance structures for including stakeholders and the community in the management of SWIS. There may, however, be advisory groups established to advise providers on specific issues such as the delivery of services to Māori. However, even where schools do have representatives on management committees, there still has to be a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities and those representatives have to be seen by schools as a viable avenue for decision-making.

8.5   Independent social services providers

Demands by some schools to have the right to appoint social workers directly generally flowed from negative experiences with either social workers or providers. In a small percentage of cases these tensions were created because of a feeling that the social worker was not able to deliver the level of professional services expected by the school. More commonly, however, the school's negative feeling towards SWIS was based on a poor relationship between the provider and the school. A weakness in the relationship between providers and schools was a general problem throughout SWIS sites.

This weakness has to be seen as a structural problem within the development of SWIS, rather than simply a problem of contract compliance or lack of professionalism by social service agencies. All parties to SWIS significantly underestimated the amount of time and effort that providers would be required to put into maintaining relationships with stakeholders. The almost organic development of a second tier of management within a number of SWIS sites illustrated recognition by providers of this gap in their services. The funding mechanisms for SWIS should recognise that there are major management responsibilities in maintaining the myriad of relationships on which SWIS depends and that these are separate responsibilities from the provision of social work supervision. Contracts for a larger number of positions per provider will also assist in allowing better economies of scale in this area.

Transferring control for SWIS to the school would not necessarily ensure better continuity of service. Social service providers, because they are likely to employ a number of social service professionals, including social workers, are in a better position than schools to fill gaps when individuals leave. The provision of services by individual schools would also further isolate social workers from their practice, already a concern in this programme. It would also raise questions about the ability of schools to provide the level of social service supervision and support that should be expected from a good social service provider. Having social workers employed directly by schools would also have the disadvantage of separating social workers from access to the wraparound services that might be available through a social service provider.

An intermediate approach of schools themselves joining together to create a social service provider would go some way to meeting these concerns. However, many of the problems that any social service provider may experience might still surface.

There is therefore a stronger argument for including schools more effectively in some form of governance of the SWIS clusters, but continuing to provide SWIS through independent, experienced and external social service providers.

8.6   Isolation

Isolation remains a significant challenge to social workers in schools. This was identified as a major concern as part of the pilot evaluation. Social workers working as individuals in schools and with families, without strong support, face considerable professional risk. They are also in danger of placing their clients and their families at some degree of risk as well. The problem of rural isolation was less evident in the evaluation of the expansion than had been the case in the pilot. This, however, should largely be seen as a result of a more strongly urban focus being taken in this round. Providing social work services in rural areas still posed significant risks of physical isolation and put social workers at a greater risk of danger to themselves or their clients. Many social service and health providers only enter the homes of clients in pairs, which is often not possible for individual social workers, particularly those working in isolated rural areas.

Even where social workers are working in schools with a wide range of other professionals there is still a danger of professional isolation. Social workers have to manage a series of complex and inter-professional relationships as part of SWIS. It is essential for the well-being of their clients and for their well-being as social workers that they have access to good professional support, including high quality professional supervision. Because social workers have these complex lateral relationships with a wide range of others it is also important to have an accessible and local provider. Accessibility helps the provider to maintain the network of relationships at a managerial level. It also allows them to be sufficiently accessible to be able to intercede at short notice on the social worker's or client's behalf and to be readily available to schools and other stakeholders when issues arise.

In avoiding isolation there are also major advantages in having social work providers that are located in the community that they service. A number of contracts were awarded to providers in the expansion round that were at a considerable distance from the school sites. Sometimes these involved health camps in different towns to the schools, chosen because they already had strong relationships with the schools. There was also evidence that in particular cases schools wanted to distance themselves from local providers in which they had little confidence, even though these providers had experience and competence in providing social work services. This placed both the social workers and their clients and the provider at a considerable degree of risk, as often it proved very difficult to maintain the strong community relationships on which the programme depends.

8.7   Continuity of service

One threat to the continuity of SWIS service has been the high turnover of social workers. The resulting breaks in service were a major feature in school dissatisfaction and had a negative impact on relationships with clients. This was particularly the case where resignations or relocations of social workers had led to substantial periods without a social worker. Often this lack of satisfaction was greater when schools felt that they had lost an important and valued resource. Because of the relationship-building component involved in SWIS, temporary replacements were not necessarily acceptable or useful.

The high level of staff turnover being experienced across all sites is one of the most important challenges to SWIS. Slowness in appointing social workers and gaps in delivery of social work services also created real problems for all stakeholders, with consequences for children and families. In one case a provider also shifted workers

from one location to another for a variety of good reasons, but underestimated the impact of this transfer on clients and on schools.

Providers had major difficulties recruiting suitable staff, meaning that some schools had a significantly reduced service and others complained of no service at all for extended periods of time. While there was some capacity of providers to use other social workers from within SWIS or from outside to fill gaps, this was certainly inadequate and was not sustainable for any but short periods of time. Breaks in service created other flow-on problems for SWIS. New social workers had to be inducted and trained and missed the annual national training presentations. New social workers also have to spend a considerable amount of time to become known within the community and for them to develop the important trust relationships on which their work depends. Every time a social worker leaves, this lengthy process needs to be repeated.

The reasons for the departure of social workers were many and varied. A number of social workers left because they found that the expectations they had for the role were not being fulfilled, while others realised they were probably unsuitable for the position. Some social workers left for higher-paying jobs in other sectors. Many social workers, especially the more recently qualified, embarked on a period of overseas travel. Some left with a degree of dissatisfaction with their role or the with level of support they had received from their providers. Others left because of the lack of a career structure within SWIS and their inability therefore to gain promotion.

Social workers showed high levels of satisfaction with their work but there was evidence of social worker burn-out and many schools and other agencies raised concerns about case loads. So far it has proven very difficult to compare case loads because of the different styles of social work practice being adopted by individual social workers and by providers. The management of case loads is a particularly critical responsibility of providers given the relative isolation of social workers in schools compared with many other forms of social service delivery. Again, the management of case loads and managing the risk of worker burn-out requires providers to have a strong understanding of the communities SWIS serves and to understand the different dynamics of stakeholder relationships within those communities.

Replacing social workers who have resigned or left is currently extremely difficult. Filling the need for greater numbers of Māori and Pacific workers in the field was even more difficult. There is currently a national shortage of trained, competent and experienced staff. This was even more so in smaller provincial towns and rural areas. Some SWIS positions have had to be re-advertised before attracting suitable applicants. Some providers expressed concern that increases in social workers' pay within Child, Youth and Family would create more pressure on positions, and that increased salary levels for SWIS social workers were required. Schools often expressed amazement at the low salaries being paid social workers when compared with those of teachers. The capacity of the social service sector and social work educators to provide sufficiently trained and competent workers to service a rapidly expanded SWIS programme is also currently problematic, and particularly so for Māori and Pacific workers. These are crucial issues in any expansion of SWIS and will need to be addressed specifically.

8.8   Māori and Pacific providers and practitioners

Iwi and Pacific providers, clients and communities were adamant that the appointment of iwi and Pacific workers was important. On the other hand, some mainstream providers argued that clients needed the best social workers available regardless of their ethnicity. There was little doubt that Māori and Pacific clients demanded professional services from able social workers, irrespective of their ethnicity. Nonetheless, there was also evidence from clients and stakeholders that a competent

worker who was culturally familiar, who was, for example, Māori for Māori (and Tainui for Tainui), Samoan for Samoan or Tongan for Tongan, added a major premium to the service.

What was significant for clients was that in most cases it was not just the social workers that were Pākehā but also the majority of other professionals in their lives. For example, in one of the site areas all of the principals were Pākehā and in others all of the PHN's were Pākehā. The problem is not so much the absence of Māori social workers but the absence of any professionals with whom clients can have a strong cultural identification.

Mainstream service providers should be ensuring that, over time, they have Māori and Pacific workers so that clients have some choice over whom they see. It is not suggested that a panel of social workers should serve each school. Rather, social workers should be able to draw on a range of other ethnically-specific approaches and workers in the community as backup, ensuring that the availability of these is known within the schools where they work.

Social workers are inevitably going to be working with clients from other cultures. Māori and Pacific providers have adapted SWIS well to deal with the needs of all those in their school populations. For Māori providers this involved the use of manaakitanga, being responsible for non-iwi members, and for the Pacific provider, close relationships with a Māori provider.

The whole school community, however, was the responsibility of social workers and the provider and all agencies needed to have policies for dealing with the breadth of cultural groups that they served. Mainstream providers needed to ensure that they had a range of policies to deal with Māori, Pacific and other cultural groups. The Pacific provider needed to ensure that an island-specific focus also met the needs of the range of non-Samoan Pacific peoples as well as Māori, Pākehā and other groups. Māori providers, where there was a non-Māori population in the school, needed to also address the needs of these groups. In many cases service providers were making attempts to deal with this issue but this process needs to be strengthened.

The strong focus on Māori and Pacific peoples needs to be seen as first reflecting Treaty responsibilities to Māori and secondly recognising social disparities between Māori and Pacific and non-Māori and non-Pacific peoples within New Zealand. Finally, the numeric significance of these groups within the low decile schools on which SWIS has been focused also needs to be acknowledged.

8.9 Kura Kaupapa Māori

The involvement of Kura Kaupapa Māori in SWIS has been slower and less extensive than that of other schools. This is not unexpected, given the experience of other external providers in attempting to provide appropriate services to kura. Kura, despite a willingness to become involved, often were only loosely connected with SWIS even when there were strong iwi Māori providers and Māori social workers providing the service. The reasons for this lack of uptake by kura were often tied to a number of concerns that kura had with what was seen as a mainstream programme. Kura expect that social workers, along with any professionals entering the kura, should be fluent in Te Reo Māori. Kura also looked upon their own whānau as being the most appropriate resource for dealing with the social issues of children.

In the sample of providers included for this evaluation there was only one provider with kura included in the cluster. The social worker for the kura had a strong knowledge of tikanga and was fluent in Te Reo Māori. The result has been a much greater involvement of the kura with SWIS and little, if any, difference in the use of the social worker compared with other schools. Two other neighbouring kura, although not accessing the service, have also expressed their support. Although this is only

one experience, it suggests that Māori service providers with fluent Māori speakers who are familiar with the tikanga of the kura can provide accessible services to kura.

8.10 Pacific children and families

There was no evidence to suggest that the SWIS model cannot be used successfully for Pacific people. As has been the case in developing other mainstream services for Pacific peoples, it takes more time to establish services properly in Pacific communities. This establishment process requires greater levels of networking and greater access by social workers to the different resources that exist within Pacific communities themselves. Good partnership relationships at both management and worker level are essential.

However, without an increase in the number of Pacific providers and Pacific social workers, SWIS's partnership with Pacific communities will be one-sided. Social workers and mainstream agencies will be drawing on Pacific communities to assist them in gaining access to these communities in the interests of their clients. However, Pacific communities will not be benefiting from the development of greater experience to deal with the issues of their own client populations. Pacific communities are complex. There are many diverse island groups represented and this is further broken down into different church and village communities. Distinctions between the New Zealand and island-born are also important. Such a wide range of difference makes it difficult to ensure that all those communities will have services that reflect their particular cultural and community backgrounds. Generic and mainstream services are also going to be required and are always going to have to deliver effective services to those communities.

In one of the sites with a large Pacific population being served by SWIS, the mainstream and Māori provider became increasingly able to respond to the needs of Māori clients. Responses to Pacific clients were a little less effective. Because this provider has good relationships with Pacific providers through other areas of its work, it can be expected that, as the service develops, delivery to Pacific people will also improve.

In addition, it would be dangerous to assume that Pacific clients not serviced by SWIS are able to deal with the issues that face their children and families solely from within their own communities. Pacific families also need to be able to choose between a wider range of different services and providers. As the greater diversity and inclusiveness of approach and personnel already evident in SWIS develops further, more effective delivery is likely for Pacific clients and families.

8.11 Wraparound services where available

The ability of social workers and their clients to access effectively the wide range of services that may be required is greatly enhanced where providers of social work services have access to a wide range of other support services. Providers with a range of contracts and services need to ensure that social workers are aware of these services and have seamless access to them.

To some extent, the access to wraparound services also skewed the kinds of services that were readily available. The core business of the providers often determined those most readily available. The health camp provider, for instance, used their health camp resources effectively to provide a range of different supports, including food and household resources, parenting courses, as well as residential programmes for children.

The relationship between SWIS and the other wraparound services provided is not just one-way. These other services should not just be seen as a resource for SWIS. SWIS also provided services complementary to other aspects of a provider's portfolio

of services. Social workers in schools provided referrals from a population that was sometimes difficult to access and, in the case of health camp providers, they also created a valuable link between residential services and the community. There was a danger, however, that ready access to a particular range of services may be too easily relied upon where there is a strong need for access to different kinds of services for children and families. There was some evidence in this evaluation of subtle pressure being put on social workers to use in-house services rather than attempt to access external programmes.

8.12 Social service networking

Social workers brought to schools access to a wide range of social services, many of which had resources that could be positively applied to the needs of their children and families. Māori social workers belonging to their local iwi had major advantages in networking within their communities. Prior to the introduction of SWIS many schools developed their own knowledge of the social, health and other support resources of their communities, but with the introduction of SWIS these resources were made much more readily available. Social workers who were from the community had a major advantage in knowing the community resources that were available. Social workers appointed from outside had to develop these links, but having done so, were also seen as having the ability to develop strong relationships with both statutory and voluntary services available to the community.

8.13 Access to referral services

Access to referral services varied substantially depending on the location of social workers and the range of services that were directly available through the provider. There was little or no funding being made available to social workers for the purchase of services for children and families from the contract itself. This was a source of concern for some social workers and providers who felt that they were forced to beg and borrow to get their clients into appropriate programmes. One provider was particularly concerned with the lack of priority given to their social workers in getting resources through Strengthening Families. Other participants, while expressing the same frustration with delays to services, were concerned that giving SWIS clients priority access to services would inevitably give a lesser priority to the more serious needs of children and families referred through other programmes. Funding SWIS more extensively for the cost of such referrals may have the same effect of cutting across the needs of those children and families. Without appropriate and timely services being available then there is a danger that the effectiveness of SWIS could be undermined.

8.14 Ability to co-ordinate a range of services

The placement of social workers in schools provides a strategic location for the co-ordination of social work services. The social workers' independence often allowed them to establish a special relationship with clients and the school-based social workers link school, family and community with a range of other specialist services, such as those provided by health, welfare and educational agencies. The social worker's overall responsibility for child and family welfare also underlined the potential effectiveness of this role. There is considerable evidence from the case studies of social workers taking significant lead roles in dealing with the clients where there were a number of different professionals involved.

8.15 Training and recognition of SWIS as a social work specialisation

Social workers in schools shared a strongly-held belief that their work was a highly specialised form of social work practice. The issues that flowed from dealing with

children and families and developing programmes for schools, the voluntary nature of SWIS and the multiple relationships that were involved were all used as evidence of the need to provide highly specialised training and support for SWIS social workers.

The devolution of social services under the umbrella of a national programme provides a significant challenge. There is a need to ensure the overall co-ordination of training. There is also a need to clarify the boundaries between the providers' responsibility to train social workers and support their professional development and the national responsibilities of government to do so. National requirements, such as adherence to protocols, need to be maintained and various centralised changes to the programme have to be adequately explained to providers and social workers and supported by appropriate training. There needs to be greater negotiation between major stakeholders, social workers, providers, schools and Child, Youth and Family over training requirements and training planning. It is important not to leave schools out of this consultation process as, in the early days of SWIS, schools had a tendency to resent training as keeping social workers away from their frontline experience.

Training needs involve an understanding of the specialist nature of strengths-based programmes within schools and the ability to use the networks of education, health and other social service professionals in the best interests of children and families. Social workers have a great deal of professional flexibility in exercising their role and need to be able to test their experience against developing models of best practice. There is also an ongoing need for basic training and support in the key processes outlined in the operating protocols. One-off training programmes do not meet the needs of a rapidly changing workforce. There is a need for ongoing induction and training packages.

Responsibility for improving training lies at a number of different levels. It is important that more resources be made available to Child, Youth and Family to ensure that ongoing support for training in the operating protocols can be provided. This level of support needs to be considerably more extensive than that available during most of the period of the evaluation. In addition, providers need to ensure that there is better support for the specialist needs of their workers. Schools of Social Work should have a role in developing professional and post-professional courses that recognise the specialist nature of SWIS social work. There is certainly a need for short courses on specific aspects of social service delivery within schools.

8.16 Dealing with client transience

One of the more interesting challenges for social workers in schools arose through the work undertaken with children and families experiencing some degree of transience. In the pilot evaluation, transience was discussed as a major challenge to SWIS, because of high levels of movement in and out of schools and in and out of SWIS clusters. It was felt that many of those children and families who were most at-risk were those who were most transient. SWIS social workers were limited to a specific geographical locality and could not adequately deal with the needs of children who were shifted in and out of that locality for a variety of social and economic reasons.

In this evaluation there was a concern with transience as a limit on continuity of service and an interest in the way that transience affected outcomes for children and families. There was evidence of families using relocation to escape intolerable situations, in one case to escape the abusive attentions of an ex-partner. However, movements of children from school to school and from place to place did sometimes have positive characteristics. Children and families were able to move into better and safer environments. Social workers were able to work with families to allow them to make considered decisions about relocating that led to positive improvements for their children. Social workers were able to assist families to make sure that they were making positive choices. Their help facilitated families to make more informed decisions about what was in the best interests of their children and themselves.