



WHOLE CHILD APPROACH

A guide to applying the whole child approach



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

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About the guide

This guide contributes to the first of seven key action areas in *New Zealand's Agenda for Children: Making life better for children (Agenda for Children)*.

To support the implementation of the *Agenda for Children* the Government determined that the whole child approach should be the basis for child policy and service development. This guide provides advice for policy makers, programme developers and those involved in service delivery to apply the whole child approach in their work.

The advice in this guide can be used by both government and non-government agencies at all stages of developing and implementing policies and programmes affecting children and young people under the age of 18 years.¹

The guide has three main parts. Part one outlines a practical guide to applying the whole child approach. Parts two and three provide a rationale for the approach and examples of how the whole child approach is being applied.

Government decisions

In 2002, the Government agreed that the whole child approach should be the basis for child policy and service development, in conjunction with the youth development approach outlined in the *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa*.

Government also directed government agencies to consult with the Ministry of Social Development on how to apply the whole child approach when developing policy advice and initiatives relating to the 0-17 age group.

A recent survey of government agencies showed that this requirement was not well known. This guide aims to help policy and programme developers to apply the whole child approach in their policy and programme work.

¹This age range is consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC).

Before reading on, please note...

This guide can only provide starting points for policy and programme developers because each area of policy or service provision has its own particular characteristics and demands. In every area of policy development, however, you are now required, in line with current social policy development goals, to consider the social, economic, legal and political implications for children and young people, even if these may not be immediately apparent.

PART ONE: PRACTICAL GUIDE

What is the whole child approach?

The whole child approach in the development of policy and services is about making sure the needs, rights and interests of children and young people are taken into account. This is achieved by ensuring that, where possible, children and young people are involved in the policy-making and decision-making processes, and that policies contribute to the healthy development and wellbeing of all children.

Addressing children's issues requires moving away from seeing children only as vulnerable dependents in need of adult care, protection and guidance because of their immaturity. Nor should children be viewed as 'adults in development', as passive recipients of services, as possessions of their parents or as 'problems'.

A whole child approach recognises that although children do depend on others, at times making them vulnerable, they are continuing to learn and grow. In the process they develop the skills they need to look after themselves and to make decisions about their lives.



What taking a whole child approach means

In policy and service development for children, taking a whole child approach means:

- focusing on the big picture, on the child's whole life and circumstances and the links between individual issues and other aspects of their lives
- focusing from the outset on what children need for healthy development and wellbeing
- looking across the whole public service at what can be done to support children's healthy development
- considering multi-level interventions in the settings of family/whānau, friends and peers, school and the wider community
- viewing children as having valuable knowledge to contribute to developing and evaluating policies and services that affect them
- considering ways in which children can be involved in decision-making on issues that affect them.

Further information on the development of the whole child approach, the rationale for its use, and a full description of the key settings model is provided in Part Two of this guide.

An additional consideration

A whole child approach should be applied to a wide range of policies and services, including those that are not explicitly targeted at children but affect them as part of families or as part of a broader population, as well as policies and services which are directly aimed at children, or some groups of children.

Children are not one homogenous grouping and your policy development or service provision could:

- apply to all children, eg changes in the core school curriculum that affects all children
- be aimed at specific groups of children, eg policies aimed at enhancing participation of children with disabilities, children receiving care and protection services, youth justice policies
- be specific to children as an age group of the population, eg health or education policies related to children under six years of age
- apply to all people in relation to a specific issue, eg a policy on pedestrian safety or retirement income but that has implications for children
- apply to families and whānau with dependent children, eg parent support and development or social assistance policy.



What questions do I need to ask?

Ideally, you need to consider the whole child approach at the very beginning or in the planning stages of your policy or programme development. You might have reached a certain stage in your work and realised it is important to consider how to apply the whole child approach, including involving children and young people.

At whatever stage you first consider applying the whole child approach some key questions need to be asked in relation to your particular policy or service provision:

What will be the effects on children of this policy, programme or service?

- How will this policy affect children's access or participation?
- How will children's health or wellbeing be affected?
- How will children's knowledge or independence be affected?

Will there be differential effects?

- Will different groups of children be affected in different ways?
- Will benefits/risks be different for boys or girls or for different groupings of children according to age, ethnicity, disability/ability, geographic location, as consumers or clients of services?

How can we involve children in work on this policy?

- In what ways can we ensure children affected by this policy are able to share their ideas and perspectives to inform this work?
- What can we learn from other agencies and organisations about involving children?

What links need to be considered?

- What other agencies may be working in this or associated areas?
- What provisions exist already for children?
- What other policy strategies need to be linked into this work?

What are the key settings to focus on?

- Which key settings are most directly applicable to this work, eg family/whānau, kinship groups and peers, the community and its institutions, the broader social, cultural and economic environment?
- Does this policy affect children's lives in more than one key setting? If so, in what ways?

How will other settings influence this policy?

- Can changes in another key setting influence proposed changes in the setting you are presently focusing on?
- What broad policy, funding or regulatory frameworks could affect your current work?
- How could relationships between children, their peers or others in the community be affected or influenced by this policy or service?

How do I do it?

The following is an example of applying the whole child approach to a policy issue affecting children as members of the general population.

Improving pedestrian safety

What will be the effects on children?

- Pedestrian safety is an important issue for everyone. It directly affects children for two reasons:
 - pedestrian injury is a major cause of unintentional injury, death or hospitalisation for children in New Zealand



- children are only able to move around the community independently as pedestrians or cyclists, so it is important that they are able to do so safely.
- Actions to improve pedestrian safety would affect other aspects of children's lives by increasing their independence and access to their school, peer group and recreational opportunities, and improving their safety knowledge.

Will there be differential effects?

Action to improve pedestrian safety needs to consider the following varying factors:

- Pedestrian injury varies for children of different ages. School-aged children, especially 5 to 6-year-olds, are more likely to be involved in 'on-road' accidents. In contrast, 0 to 4-year-olds are more likely to be injured or killed in 'off-road' accidents (eg in driveways).
- Māori children are at greater risk of being killed or injured as pedestrians, and Pacific children are at greater risk of being hospitalised.
- Boys are more likely to be injured than girls as pedestrians, with 5 to 9-year-old boys being at greatest risk of pedestrian injury.

Ways to involve children could include:

- asking them about their experiences as pedestrians and what they do to keep safe on the roads
- asking them about how to improve footpaths, roads and crossings to make them safer, and for other ideas to improve pedestrian and road safety
- establishing an advisory group of children and young people to represent their interests at a local or national level
- working with children to identify the key messages for road safety public education campaigns and the ways these messages could be conveyed to their peers and adults
- exploring ways to involve children in evaluating road safety public education campaigns.

What links need to be considered?

Work in this area needs to consider, and to contribute to:

- national roading strategies
- local plans for road development and local and regional pedestrian strategies
- existing pedestrian safety initiatives such as 'walking school buses' and the Safe Routes to School Programme developed for children by Safekids and the Land Transport Safety Authority

- the work and role of the Land Transport Safety Authority
- individual school road safety strategies and rules.

What are the key settings to focus on?

- This issue needs a multi-level approach involving communication between children and parents, schools, town and transport planners, roading engineers, road safety experts (including the Police) and community leaders.
- Education will be important in raising road safety awareness among children and family and whānau members, and to alert drivers to specific safety issues relating to children (eg when crossing roads, children do not judge speed and distance as accurately as adults and are more likely to be distracted).
- We would also need to improve the roading environment so that it more effectively meets the needs of children and enables them to use the roads safely (eg the location of playgrounds on busy roads, places for school buses to stop, speed bumps in suburban areas).

How will other settings influence this?

- The policy, funding and regulatory frameworks for roading and road safety would affect the way the issue can be addressed.

Two further examples of applying the whole child approach are included in the appendix.

What will the whole child approach add to my work?

It enhances the quality of policy and programme development for children and young people

The whole child approach provides:

- a framework for examining how children and young people will be affected by policies or programmes of action
- a way to address any issues or barriers that prevent children in New Zealand from leading safe, healthy and fulfilling lives.

Using the whole child approach means that the quality of any policy advice in any sector, be it social development, education, health, justice, is enhanced



because it has taken into account any likely impacts on children and young people. Even when policies are not primarily aimed at children, they may still have important consequences for children and young people in their daily living. Consequently, policies and programmes across all sectors of society must be scrutinised for their effects on children and young people. The whole child approach provides a tool for that scrutiny.

It is important to invest in children and families early as the relationship between family, pre-school and school settings and the crucial importance of the first five years in a child's life mean that gains from early investment are likely to grow over time.

The value-added dimension to any policy work of using the whole child approach is seen in how the policy or programme promotes:

- positive outcomes for children and young people
- increased opportunities for children and young people to participate in the decision-making processes concerning issues affecting them
- solutions to policy problems or service issues affecting individual children that cannot be resolved by one agency or one sector in isolation.

It ensures policy and programme development is consistent with government policies

Taking a whole child approach in policy and programme development is also consistent with current Government policies and strategies in the areas of social services, education and health.

The following policies are based on a whole child approach even though they were launched before the *Agenda for Children*.

The *Child Health Strategy (1998)* outlines what is required to improve child health services and ultimately the health status of New Zealand's children until 2010. Individuals and organisations within the health sector have been asked to identify what the Strategy's vision, principles and future directions mean for their work as planners, funders, providers and policy advisors. The Strategy has four priority populations: tamariki Māori; Pacific children; children with high health and disability support needs; and children from families with multiple social and economic disadvantages.

Another key government policy document that relates to the provision of education and care of our youngest children in New Zealand is the Early Childhood Strategic Plan *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki (2002-2012)*. *Pathways to the Future* sets out the Government's vision for all children to have the opportunity to participate in quality early childhood education, no

matter what their circumstances. Early childhood programmes and services are key settings for the development and wellbeing of a large percentage of children under five years of age in New Zealand. As such, developments in this context provide an important basis for children as they make their transitions from the family setting to an early childhood education setting, and from there into their compulsory schooling.

Pathways to the Future also strengthens the implementation of *Te Whāriki*² the national early childhood curriculum. This curriculum is based on Bronfenbrenner's³ ecological model of human development that underpins the whole child approach to policy and service development.

The following strategies and policies actively support and promote the whole child approach.

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) sets out its strategic leadership in the social services sector and its direction for social development in New Zealand in its annual Statement of Intent. The Ministry's vision is:

An inclusive New Zealand where all people are able to participate in the social and economic life of their communities.

In relation to children and young people the intended outcome of social policy development is:

Children and young people are respected and valued and have a say in the decisions that affect them. They are protected from the negative effects of poverty, violence, abuse or neglect, and they are able to reach their full potential.

MSD will achieve this outcome by working to improve the focus of government policy and services for children by taking a whole child approach and youth development approach, and by working to promote the participation of children and young people in decisions that affect them.

In January 2003 the Government released *Sustainable Development for New Zealand: Programme of Action*. This programme of action sets out the government's directions in a number of areas including Investing in Child and Youth Development (ICYD).

²Ministry of Education, *Te Whāriki He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa Early Childhood Curriculum*, Wellington, Learning Media, 1996.

³See Part Two for a more detailed description of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model.



The overarching goal of ICYD is:

All children and young people have the opportunity to participate, to succeed and to make contributions that benefit themselves and others, now and in the future.

ICYD draws on the Agenda for Children and the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa. Both strategies describe a whole-of-government approach for achieving positive child and youth development. The planned programme of action for ICYD is consistent with the whole child and youth development approaches.

Current policies and strategies in New Zealand clearly set out the rationale and confirm the importance of applying the whole child approach to ensure that the rights, interests and needs of children in New Zealand are incorporated into policy and service development.

Where can I get more help?

You need to refer to the policy document *New Zealand's Agenda for Children* (June 2002) on www.msd.govt.nz for further information about the *Agenda for Children*.

You will find other resources developed by the Ministry of Social Development helpful, such as *Involving Children: A guide to engaging children in decision-making* and the pamphlet *Taking A Whole Child Approach*.

You can also contact the Agenda for Children Project Team at agendaforchildren@msd.govt.nz for further assistance.

Recommended reading

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Sustainable Development for New Zealand: Programme of Action*, Wellington, January 2003.

Early Childhood Development, *A Draft Charter of the Rights of the Māori Child Te Mana o te Tamaiti Māori*, Early Childhood Development, Wellington, 2002. (Bilingual document.)

Ministry of Education, *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki (2002-2012)*, Ministry of Education, Wellington, 2002. www.minedu.govt.nz

Ministry of Education, *Te Whāriki He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa Early Childhood Curriculum*, Learning Media, Wellington, 1996. www.minedu.govt.nz

Ministry of Health, *Child Health Strategy*, Ministry of Health, Wellington, 1998. www.moh.govt.nz

Ministry of Health, *Youth Health: A Guide to Action*, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Youth Affairs, Wellington, 2002. www.moh.govt.nz

Ministry of Social Development, *New Zealand's Agenda for Children: Making life better for children*, Ministry of Social Development, Wellington, 2002. www.msd.govt.nz

Ministry of Social Development, *Statement of Intent 2004*, Wellington, 2004.

Ministry of Youth Affairs, *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa*, Ministry of Youth Affairs, Wellington, 2002. www.youthaffairs.govt.nz

Office for Disability Issues, *The New Zealand Disability Strategy: Making a World of Difference Whakanui Oranga*, Wellington, 2003. www.odi.govt.nz

Te Puni Kōkiri Ministry of Māori Development and the Office of the Commissioner for Children, *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child He Hui Whakatau I te Mana o te Tamaiti a te Whakakotahitanga o ngā Whenua o te Ao*, Wellington, 1999. (Bilingual document.)



PART TWO: RATIONALE FOR THE APPROACH

Why is the whole child approach essential to policy development?

To apply the whole child approach requires some understanding and knowledge about the conceptual frameworks and the evidence that underpins the approach. This section provides the background information you need for using the whole child approach in all areas of policy development and service provision.

There are five broad areas informing the whole child approach that emerge from current literature:

- the changing views of children, childhood and child development
- children's rights and children's 'voice'
- sources of evidence and involving children in research
- the key settings model and the ecological model of development
- the creation of children's 'spaces' in policy and service provision.

Changing views of children, childhood and child development

Throughout history societies have defined children and childhood in many different ways. These views have shaped the extent to which children's needs, rights and interests have been responded to or incorporated into policies and programmes in the wider society.

The whole child approach requires that children be viewed as active and creative participants:

Children are not the passive recipients of an adult's teaching. Skills and information from outside the child are not simply transferred to inside the child, because children take an active, inventive role and reconstruct tasks through their own understanding. In the process of acquiring skills and information, children transform them and are therefore creative (Smith and Taylor, 2000).

Children gradually come to know and understand the world through their own activities in communication with others. A continual process of learning generates development. The greater the richness of the activities and the interactions that children participate in, the greater will be their understanding and knowledge (Smith, 2002).

The whole child approach depends on adult decision-makers and policy developers viewing the child:

... as a competent and capable child, a rich child, who participates in the creation of themselves and their knowledge – the child as a constructor of culture and knowledge (Moss, 2003).

Moss and Petrie (2002) have described the child as a person:

... who is also a co-constructor of identity, a social agent and a citizen with rights, a member of a defined social group and we need, as adults, to take into account the childhood that children are living now.

Also, how we talk about children and childhood and its contexts or settings has a powerful influence on our views of children:

Childhood (like parenthood) is a socially constructed concept, and therefore neither universal, static nor immutable: it is what we, as a society, make it. Children live through childhood. Children have 'childhood careers' characterised by changing vulnerabilities, changing competencies, changing abilities for social participation and changing needs for protection, as they pass through and out of childhood. Childhood may be the foundation of the adulthood that children grow into; but it is also a stage in the life course that is important in its own right, and constitutes a permanent phenomenon in society (Moss and Petrie, 1997).

When children are viewed as active participants in their world then it is also important that the opportunities for children to be safe, secure and to participate are enshrined in children's rights.



Children's rights

There is a growing awareness of the need to lift children's status and to take children seriously as human beings who have the same rights as other human beings, but a greater need than others for adults to take action on their behalf (Davies, Wood and Hassall, 2003).

The Treaty of Waitangi and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC)⁴ are foundation documents of the Agenda for Children and the whole child approach:

- The Treaty requires the Crown to work in partnership with Māori to protect and respond to collective and individual interests of Māori wellbeing and development.
- UNCROC was adopted and opened for signature by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989.

Government and non-government organisations report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on progress towards our fulfilment of the articles of UNCROC.

UNCROC's articles cover three main areas of rights for children:

- provision rights: rights to health, education, social security, physical care, family life, play, recreation, culture and leisure
- protection rights: being safe from discrimination, all forms of physical or mental violence, physical and sexual abuse, exploitation, substance abuse, injustice and conflict
- participation rights: the right to a name and identity, to be consulted and be taken into account, to physical integrity, to information, to freedom of speech and opinion and to challenge decisions made on their behalf (Lansdown, 1994).

The question of children's rights is still contested by some groups in society. As Hassall and Davies (2003) point out in their discussion on the use and misuse of UNCROC:

To many people, children's rights have come to mean encouragement of children to defy their parents and elders and an excuse for young people to misbehave. They are a licence for the young to stray from their people's customs. They mean interference in family and cultural practice by arrogant and ignorant outsiders. These views cannot be dismissed

⁴The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) was ratified by New Zealand in 1993.

out of hand. If they are to be successfully challenged they must first be recognised and their validity examined dispassionately.

According to Hassall and Davies, what is required is improved public education about the Convention so that it can be debated and subsequently have a positive effect on policy development for children and young people in this country.

The whole child approach, in contrast to the view of children's rights usurping or undermining those of the family, promotes a view of children as people in their own right, while still recognising their need for protection and care within a family/whānau setting.

Underpinning the rights of children as set out in UNCROC is a particular view of children:

Children are viewed not as subjects requiring charity or philanthropy but as citizens (and agents) in spite of their temporary state of immaturity [UNCROC] represents a set of claims made on behalf of the child to activate the obligations and responsibility of adults in a society (Earls and Carson, 2001).

Consistent with UNCROC is A Draft Charter of the Rights of the Māori Child *Te Mana o te Tamaiti Māori* (2002) published by Early Childhood Development (ECD). This Charter is a bilingual document which is a result of two years consultation with Iwi/Māori Social Service, health and education provider groups and which evolved through the delivery of the programme *Atawhaingia te Pā Harakeke* (Training and support for Māori and Iwi providers) by the Māori Training Unit of ECD. The fundamental ethos of the Charter is:

The Māori child, like all other children around the world:

- has human rights which are the basis of freedom, justice and peace
- needs special care and attention
- grows up best within a loving whānau
- needs legal and other protection
- will flourish in an environment that acknowledges and respects their cultural values.

The fundamental principals of *Te Mana o te Tamaiti Māori* are: *Whakamana, Kotahitanga, Whānaungatanga, Ngā Hononga*. Ngā Hononga describes the Māori child existing within a society of extensive relationships and having the right to know, to contribute positively to, and to benefit from those relationships.



Children's 'voice'

We need to continue to challenge our traditional thinking about children and childhood, and our concern about the competency of children to participate. Any doubts we may have about their ability to share their ideas about their needs, interests and rights need to be overcome:

Children's viewpoints have often been ignored because of their presumed incompetence. Powerful normative models of what children can and cannot do are embedded in cultural contexts. Almost everything that children have ever been assumed incapable of doing, such as seeing things from other people's perspectives or being reliable witnesses, has been challenged by social science research (Smith and Taylor, 2000).

Smith, Gollop, Taylor and others in New Zealand have researched and written about gaining and providing opportunities for children's 'voices' to be heard within a range of social contexts, issues and services:

Our interest in children's 'voice' comes from the obvious fact that children have a unique perspective or point of view, which in the past has often been ignored ... The fact that babies and toddlers may not be able to express a point of view in words does not mean that they do not have one. Listening to children does not mean taking all children's utterances at face value or of giving their views more weight than adults, but it means attempting to put yourself in the position of the child through for example careful 'listening' and observation of the nuances of how children are curious, fearful, happy, anxious, withdrawn, what they enjoy, what they can manage alone, what they find hard to do, and where they need help (Smith, 2000).

Listening and observing is crucial in relation to hearing the views of all groups of children in our society, whether they identify as European, Māori, Pacific people or other ethnic group, whether they have a disability, are very young, are refugees or new migrants, whether they are vulnerable, or marginalised, or live in rural areas.

In our research on children in their families, schools, the legal system and the social welfare system we have always been surprised at children's competence and capability of expressing themselves (Smith, 2000).

Jamison and Gilbert (2000) review examples of meaningful ways to facilitate children's voices in public life. They provide descriptions of initiatives such as the Christchurch City Council's *Children's Strategy Study* which has the key

messages: 'Every policy affects children', 'Every adult is an advocate for children'. It is an example of how children's experiences and perceptions can be used in policy development, including town planning policies. The Article 42 Project, the Prime Minister's Youth Advisory Forum and the Youth Parliament have also provided opportunities for children and young people's voices at political and policy levels.

Young people have different life experiences and a different perspective than adults. If our political leadership and our political and social policies are to truly reflect the views of all sections of our community, young people should have the opportunity to be part of that process (Ludbrook, 1995).

Jamison and Gilbert (2000) list the benefits to us as policymakers of incorporating children's views in the policy development process:

- understanding children's perspectives of the problem
- hearing children's suggestions about how the problem might be solved
- receiving information from children about the impact that each suggested option for solving the problem may actually have on children
- knowing what children think ought to happen.

... by working in partnership with children to assess the appropriate level and form of their involvement, it is possible to effectively facilitate their voices.



Those of us currently developing policy and programmes as adults inevitably reflect back on our own childhoods and our own experiences of being heard. Our experiences took place within different historical, social, economic and political settings from those of children today. We therefore need to listen to children telling us what it is like growing up in today's society with its different challenges for and expectations of children and young people.

Sources of evidence and involving children in research

As policy developers we are engaged in evidence-based practice. Davies et al (2000) and contributors Macdonald, Nutley and Webb look at what constitutes evidence-based policy and service development in general terms and within specific policy areas such as social services.

Davies et al caution that policy and service developers need to:

- source a range of different kinds of evidence including qualitative and quantitative research about children and their lives
- be aware of the advantages and limitations of each of these sources
- ensure “that what is being done is worthwhile and that it is being done in the best possible way”.

It is also important that any policy work and service provision is informed by up-to-date statistical and research evidence about children and young people that covers all aspects of their lives. One very useful statistical resource for policy developers is Melville's *Children and young people in New Zealand: Key statistical indicators, 2003*.⁵ This is a compendium of statistics on children in New Zealand bringing together data from many sources; health, education, social services, justice, sport and recreation, land transport and so on.

An important source of evidence for policy work and programme development is from children themselves. More frequently children are participants in research in their own right. Smith (1996) says that in the past children's lives have been researched through the eyes of the adults in their lives – parents, teachers, caregivers and others.

We are not suggesting that adults are unimportant – children's autonomy must always be balanced by their dependency on those who care for them. Yet studying children from the perspective of parents, teachers or other adults provides only part of the picture. A missing part of the puzzle in understanding childhood has been the voice of the child (Smith, 2000).

⁵This is the second edition; the first edition was published in 2001.

Smith promotes talking to children about their understanding of their experiences and believes that a relationship between researchers, the research participants (children) and the context of the research has to be built up to ensure that children are comfortable and willing to share their views.

One example of incorporating the views of children and young people in research about their lives and perspectives is the research project by Gray et al (2002). It recorded the views of families, young people and service providers on what constitutes 'good outcomes' for young people. The researchers carried out 57 interviews with Māori, Pakeha and Pacific young people between the ages of seven and 18 years. The responses from the young people revealed their awareness of the barriers to achieving good outcomes in their lives as they grow up. They voiced their concerns about the affordability of education and training, and about the influence of peers, in negative and positive senses. All three groups acknowledged the support of their whānau, family and aiga, and how they could contribute to their own wellbeing and positive outcomes.

The importance of involving children in research and consulting with children about issues that affect them is a key component of the whole child approach. The information gained can continue to be useful in a number of ways. For example, children were widely consulted in the development of the Agenda for Children and their views continue to be a touchstone for work within the key action areas of the *Agenda for Children*.

Key settings model and ecological model of development

It was in the course of policy development work for the Agenda for Children that the key settings model was developed. The main theoretical basis for the key settings model is Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development⁶:

... its principle use has been as a framework for organising knowledge, generating research questions and evaluating social policy... it proposes a set of propositions and a rationale for them about the study of human development. ...[it] sees the process of development as one that enlarges the child's conception of the world and the child's ability to act on that world... it incorporates the different levels of related social systems around the developing child in which what happens outside the immediate experiences of a child (i.e. outside a child's "micro-system") affects what goes on inside those experiences (Garbarino and Abramowitz, 1992).

⁶Bronfenbrenner U, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1979.



The ecological model, according to Garbarino, provides for the development of children's conceptions of the world and for the child's ability to act on that world. Further, it provides an explanation for how a whole society needs to function in order to raise the children who will eventually take their place within that society.

The whole child approach considers the developing (and creative) child within the context of a number of interlinking settings or systems of influence:

From our perspective at the beginning of the 21st century, it no longer makes much sense to think of dealing with human problems without thinking about context, or to ignore the ongoing and lived environments in which people exist. Indeed, people are capable of living simultaneously in a large number of different contexts (Ryan, 2003).

Using the ecological framework and the knowledge we have of the key contexts or settings in which children live their lives, means we can begin to appreciate the diversity of children and childhoods, including their experiences of culturally diverse values and practices. If we accept that children and childhood are socially constructed and culturally determined, we can also appreciate that the cultural and social diversity in New Zealand society as a whole produces its own unique versions of these concepts of children and childhood.

Consistent with the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori values and perspectives on human development and Māori frameworks stand alongside those derived from our European heritages. For more information about current views on human development from Māori perspectives, we recommend you refer to researchers such as Angus Hikairo Macfarlane (2000), Mason Durie (1997), and Wally Penetito (2000). Generally, the perspectives described by these researchers are consistent with the whole child approach but the focus is on the Māori child in relation to the contexts of whānau, hapū and iwi.

Earls and Carson (2001) show how the key settings model can be applied to the promotion of children's health and wellbeing:

... the goal of child health promotion is contingent on a fundamental shift in attitudes; one that simultaneously seeks to improve the environments in which children are growing up while respecting their evolving capabilities as citizens. By placing emphasis for the promotion of child health and wellbeing in an ecological framework, the burden of responsibility is firmly situated with adults. In the many roles they assume over the welfare of children, the task of creating the appropriate circumstances for good health and the achievement of well-being in the world's children remains a great future challenge.



Although one of the key settings within which a child grows and is nurtured is the family/whānau setting, Smith (2003) cautions us against thinking that we can only consider children in relation to their families:

My experience is that once we start talking about families we start thinking about the perspective of adults in the family, and forget that children sometimes have a different and unique point of view and experience ... This does not mean that they are independent of, or isolated from their families, just that they have a unique experience within the family. Children are usually connected to their families for most of their lives, but they can be empowered or disempowered by their families, and it is important not to let their interests and rights get lost within a broad focus on the family (Smith, 2003).

As the family is the first and primary setting in which children grow and develop, it makes sense to support children by supporting their parents and/or caregivers. It is at this juncture that there is a policy link between child focused policy and family focused policy and support (Garbarino et al, 1997).

Jamison and Gilbert (2000) make the following points about family policy and children's policies and how they intersect:

The challenge lies in applying and implementing children's rights within family policy. These include the rights to survival, development, participation and protection. Family policy that fails to take children's



rights into account within the family framework is unlikely to meet sound policy goals or advance children's best interests. Consideration needs to be given to the impact of policies on children as a separate group within the family, particularly when the policy aims to improve outcomes for children, via the family.

Garbarino et al (1997) remind us that *"the issue is children"*. When our work is guided by the whole child approach we need to consider not only social policies that are directly targeted to children, but also those policies that at first do not appear to affect children and their everyday lives.

Public and private sector policies are important to children, not only because they affect children's microsystems, but also they affect the mesosystems or linkages between those microsystems as well. It is important to a child's development that mesosystems be characterised by multiple, diverse, and stable connections, and by complementary values. Policies that support strong mesosystems with these characteristics represent opportunities for children. Those that weaken connections between microsystems place children at risk.

They also argue for better co-ordination of policy decisions to ensure that they are not working against each other or have unintended negative consequences. As there is rarely one solution to problems that affect children and their families they say that each level of policy intervention makes a contribution to the overall goal of providing social services to children.

Jack (2000) considers the effects of applying a key settings/ecological approach to social work with children and families:

The ecological approach ... is not something which can be merely added to the social worker's 'tool-kit' of skills and techniques, to be used selectively, as and when appropriate. Rather it should be thought of as the tool-kit itself, out of which the various methods of assessment and intervention can be selected. It is the cultural environment within which all other policies and practices should be developed. If it is simply 'bolted-on' to existing organisational structure, it is likely to have only limited and short-term effects.

Garrett (2003) also points out the far-reaching implications for social work practice if an ecological framework or whole child approach to assessments in child protection and child welfare is fully implemented.

Jack (2000) outlines five key implications of applying an ecological model to policy and programme development. He claims that the ecological approach:

- highlights the fundamental role played by poverty and inequality in children's lives that influences healthy development through negative impacts on family functioning
- highlights the powerful influence of social interactions that take place between members of a community: their frequency, mutuality, inclusiveness, availability and supportiveness affecting individual and collective health and well-being
- shows that the most effective ways of promoting health and development of children involves ensuring adequate social support is available to their parents/caregivers
- establishes a clear picture of the balance of stresses experienced by a family and the supportive resources available to them since it is the accumulation of risk factors that are most harmful to children's development
- highlights the importance of the study of resilience factors and how they impact on practice (finding out the characteristics which protect children and families living their lives in 'high risk' environments and applying these).



Jack comments that it is worth pointing out that some of the features of resilience can be taught or developed through working alongside families and children. Such approaches are consistent with a strengths-based approach in family and community development.

Creating children's 'spaces' in policy and service provision

Moss and Petrie, University of London, have developed the concept of creating children's 'spaces' in policy and service provision. This is not just about providing a physical space for children, but also social and cultural spaces:

... where children and others can speak and be heard ... [such] environments are understood as places for children to live their lives ... [there is concern that] we are reducing public provisions for children to sites for technical practice, involving the calculated applications of disciplines and techniques that produce pre-determined outcomes, at least a particular idea of how the child should be (Moss, 2003).

Moss and Petrie outline some key questions that need to be answered to ensure children's services do begin to meet the needs, interests and rights of children in our society. It comes back to some basic questions such as:

What do we want for our children?
What is a good childhood?
What is the place of children and childhood in our society?
What should be the relationship between children, parents and society?
What is the quality of relationship we wish to promote between children and adults at home, in children's services and in society at large?

We have long neglected these fundamental questions and the issues they raise. As a result we have not developed services, policies and government structures that adequately meet the needs and interests of children as a social group (Moss and Petrie, 2002).

In the New Zealand context these questions are being responded to within the framework of the social development model (both in terms of the social protection of children and in social investment in children), and as part of making real the vision for our children that is outlined in the Agenda for Children document:

"New Zealand/Aotearoa is a great place for children: we look after one another."

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PART THREE: APPLYING THE APPROACH

Examples of programmes applying the whole child approach

A number of policy and research organisations have for some time now used a child-focused approach to their work which pre-dates the mandated whole child approach. The whole child approach has been welcomed by these agencies as a validation of the approach they have already taken in their policy and programme development work.

The following examples from the literature come from three main areas: educational settings; social services provision (including justice); and community development.

Cairns (2001) describes an initiative developed by County Durham in England called *Investing in Children*. This initiative began in 1997 and is still operating. The County has attempted to translate the principles of UNCROC into reality, particularly to show how children can be involved in the development of local policies and services that affect them. From their experience of developing their strategy *Investing in Children* Statement of Intent, based on UNCROC principles, they learned that:

- adults don't always know best (children do have something to teach adults and we as adults have to get over that hurdle)
- care must be taken that the services you provide do not inadvertently lock some children and young people out
- the approach must be based on a universal concept of children's rights.

The programmes within the initiative were developed to take into account some limitations imposed (unconsciously) by adults on children. For example, sometimes mechanisms put into place for involving children are really only opportunities to debate issues that adults think are important rather than what children think are important. Durham County has 70 different young people's groups that they engage with thereby creating many avenues for children's input to occur.

The County decided to work alongside children to identify the issues that they thought were important. Durham County has worked to create a variety of opportunities for young people to contribute to decision-making, including

drama and theatre workshops and also by involving children as researchers around topics they themselves nominated.

Cairns (2001) reports as a result of Investing in Children that Durham County has learned to:

- start with a blank sheet of paper – the more children can guide the content and direction of a project, the better the outcome for children
- be accepting of all children and young people having rights – a campaign for all children is more powerful for making change than sectioning off specific groups of children
- engage in dialogue not consultation – children want and have a right to a share of the action and simply being consulted does not mean real participation or empowerment is occurring
- allow time for change – their Investing in Children Transport Group took two years to achieve change for children
- work at a number of different levels with children and adults – what children say only has value in circumstances where some adults take notice.

Berryman et al (2000) describe how they apply the ecological model in their work in Specialist Education Services *Poutama Pounamu* Research and Development Centre. The model calls for them to examine the interconnectedness between children's settings and their behaviour. It also means confirming that the causes of behaviour problems lie within the child's immediate environment and to address them changes to the environment are required, rather than trying to change the child. Not only does their work take into account the cultural values of the parents or whānau, but also the values of the teacher. They establish relationships between school and home (across key settings) so that the aspirations of the school and whānau community are consistent and complementary. The *Poutama Pounamu* whānau work with teachers in their classrooms and they train the Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs) who work alongside teachers in the classroom. One of their key priority areas is to address Māori underachievement through ensuring that factors such as behaviour do not become an obstacle to academic and social learning.

Smith, Nairn, Taylor and Gaffney (2003) studied how young people understood and interpreted their rights as students in schools. The study selected four articles from UNCROC that describe children's rights in terms of: participation (Article 12); safety (Article 19); health (Article 24); and recreation (Article 31). Students were asked about whether they believed they influence decision-making in school within each of these areas. Half of the students (51%) agreed that there are opportunities for their views to be heard, but that being heard did



not mean their views influenced final decisions made by the principal or senior staff. School staff members were more likely to believe that students' views were taken into account than students themselves believed they were taken into account. The main findings of this study (consistent with the whole child approach) show that where children's and young people's views are sought then we can expect they have their own unique perspectives on issues of rights and access to services. Their perceptions will often be very different from the adults who are involved with them in that same context, such as a school.

The following examples show the whole child approach as it applies: to the provision of social services for children with intellectual disabilities; in the rationale behind Family Group Conferences (FGCs); for children in foster and kinship care; and in children's involvement in decision-making following parental separation.

Kelly (2003) involved children with intellectual disabilities in her Northern Ireland research on the provision of family support services for children and their families. A number of different interview techniques and approaches were used in her research with 32 children aged between two and 16 years of age. The methods used were tailored to suit the communication styles of each child. The children were visited a minimum of three times in their homes. Thirty-two parents and 16 social workers who delivered a range of services were also interviewed.

One of the key findings from the children's interviews was that they did not feel they could turn to professionals because either they did not listen to them and/or professionals did not take the time to get to know them. None of the children had been consulted about the services they were receiving, even though Kelly was able to find out their preferences through using a range of communicative approaches. Kelly's research results show that children can be consulted about services they receive, including those who have an intellectual disability. Kelly contends that adults have a clear responsibility to learn effective ways of listening to all children so they can take into account their needs, interests and rights. Kelly's approaches, methods and findings are consistent with the articles of UNCROC and the objectives of the *New Zealand Disability Strategy (2001)*.

Family group conferences (FGCs) were given statutory effect in New Zealand in 1989:

Family group conferences reflect, in their philosophy, an emphasis on the participation of families, young offenders and victims, cultural sensitivity and consensus decision-making and, in their practice, a capacity to be translated into diverse social contexts and jurisdictions (Morris et al in Hudson et al, 1996).

FGCs bring together people who have an interest in resolving a crisis that concerns those they care about and who are willing to participate in making and implementing actions. Usually this concerns immediate families/whānau but a wider definition of family, taking into account different ethnic and cultural values, is incorporated in the process of FGCs. The process incorporates Māori values and perspectives. The same process has been used with Pacific families and incorporated into other traditional cultures overseas including those in Canada and Australia. Some abused children and young offenders have been involved in FGCs but when they are they need to be supported by peers and receive encouragement from the adults and professionals involved.

There are some ongoing tensions between acknowledging professionals' statutory duties and encouraging family decision-making which is a feature of FGCs. The tensions include: valuing the input of families while adequately protecting the abused or neglected children involved; providing continuity of care and respecting children's interests, wishes or needs; and protecting rights and maintaining the informality of the process (Morris et al, 1996).

FGCs can be seen as an example of the whole child approach in action because the processes used to look for solutions to child abuse and neglect are within the key settings where children live their lives. Equally FGCs are set up to create solutions owned by all parties and to ensure a restorative and strengths-based approach is taken. Professional practice and professional competence are some of the key factors in the success of FGCs.

Smith, Gollop and Taylor (2000) talked to children in foster and kinship care about their understandings of the welfare and legal processes they had been involved in. Researchers interviewed 10 children between the ages of seven and 14 years of age who had been in care for a period of five to 13 years. While all of the children could clearly articulate their thoughts and feelings about their situation, the interviewers found that children were not always fully informed about the reasons for their care or given details about their situations. Some confusion about the roles of their social worker and their lawyer was found.

We feel that a great deal more could be done to help children in kinship and foster care to have a stronger sense of identity and direction and to allow them to be active participants in decisions about their lives. Children need to be informed, have the complexity of their family situation and any available options discussed with them, and have someone to help clarify their thoughts (Smith et al, 2000).



While a number of social services have been set up to meet the ‘best interests’ of children, and they are examples of the whole child approach, the work of Smith and her colleagues provides encouragement for professionals and practitioners to involve children more in decision-making. In other words, we are encouraged to challenge our assumptions about children’s inability to think, to create new ideas and to contribute to ensuring their safety and wellbeing, in order to fully implement the whole child approach.

Children are vulnerable when there is breakdown within the family and particularly where parents separate. When this occurs and social and legal services become involved there is an expectation that children will be included in family and legal decision-making settings. This approach is entirely consistent with the whole child approach. Smith, Taylor and Tapp (2003) consider the legal contexts within which children are asked to be involved. Achieving the best outcomes depends on:

The adults’ ability to provide a trusting, supportive and reciprocal relationship within which the child’s voice and participation can be facilitated (Smith et al, 2003).

In terms of promoting children’s rights in the wider community, the Office of the Commissioner for Children (Davis 2003) has developed (for the Ministry of Education) a proactive training strategy to raise awareness about UNCROC and to establish a base of advocates. These advocates work within their own communities to support young people in the areas of health, welfare, education and youth justice. Davis reports that in the course of their training the advocates had to make a paradigm shift from a child welfare/services perspective to a rights-based perspective. The basic premises the Office present in their training include:

- the needs and rights of children must be accepted, affirmed, prioritised and resourced by adults
- the promotion of children’s rights involves not only changing things for individual children but also changing the systems, practices and laws which affect particular groups of children and all children
- that children’s views, feelings and voices are important which means respecting children, listening to what they think and feel, and creating opportunities for them to speak and express themselves.

The advocacy training strategy is a key contribution towards strengthening the communities it has worked with. A supportive and linked up community is another key setting that can promote children’s rights, needs and interests across a range of sectors and services.

The development of the Barnardos New Zealand Child Supervised Access Service (CAS) involved many of the principles of the whole child approach. Sometimes special assistance is needed to ensure that contact with a non-custodial parent is safe for the child, or to help children develop positive relationships with parents. In these situations, the access must be supervised by a third party. Barnardos describes their supervised access service as a child focussed model – where the safety and interests of the child are paramount.

In the initial assessment of the child, the assessor must note the child’s reaction to the last contact they had with their non-custodial parents, whether the child knows the reason for supervised access, if they feel safe, whether they know the situation is not their fault, and if they have expressed any feelings about access – particularly any apprehensions. Supervised access arrangements are then reviewed after an eight week period. This review involves seeking the child’s feelings and views about the service including whether they want access to continue or to change.



The examples included in this guide are only a small selection from a relatively limited range of programmes. There are a growing number of examples of applying the whole child approach across a wider range of sectors, as we as policy makers and programme developers incorporate the approach into our work.

All progress in this area of work starts from the premise that all policy and programmes, at some level, affect the lives of children.



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Summary

The whole child approach described in this guide aims to foster, within the public sector and beyond, a new and shared view of children and childhood, and an ongoing commitment to apply these views in developing policies and services that affect children.

The consistent application of an approach that respects children's place in society and acknowledges their interests, rights and needs should result in more effective policies and services for children and their families. More effective policies and services, over time, will make New Zealand the great place that it should be for children.

Feedback

We have been unable within the scope of this guide to cover all areas of policy or programme development. We hope, however, that the information and the examples that are included are of assistance to you.

We would like to build up our database of examples of applying the whole child approach. If you have applied the approach in your work or have any feedback about this guide, we would like to hear from you. Please contact us at: agendaforchildren@msd.govt.nz

Appendix

Examples of applying the whole child approach

Reducing second-hand smoke

What will be the effects on children?

- Reducing second-hand smoke creates positive health outcomes for both children and adults. It directly affects children as they may be more at risk of harm from second-hand smoke, particularly younger children. Children may be less free to remove themselves from a situation where there are smokers present. In addition, children's developing lungs are more sensitive to airborne hazards such as second-hand smoke.
- Public education on the issue of second-hand smoke will increase children's awareness of the benefits of smoke-free environments for both children and adults.

Will there be differential effects?

- Māori children are more at risk as Māori are over-represented among smokers.
- Children in Pacific families are also more likely to be living with smokers than children in the wider New Zealand population.

How can we involve children in work on this?

Ways to involve children could include:

- asking them to find out when and where they are affected by people smoking in their environment and what they do to avoid second-hand smoke
- working with them on ways to reduce second-hand smoke in their home, school and community
- developing public education campaigns with children to raise awareness of the effects of second-hand smoke.

What links need to be considered?

Work on this issue needs to take account of:

- the National Drug Policy
- existing anti-smoking campaigns and education programmes within schools and the community.

What are the key settings to focus on?

- The key settings for this issue are family and whānau, schools, the regulatory environment and the community.
- The family and whānau setting is particularly important because this is where children are most likely to be exposed to cigarette smoke.
- Smoke-free schools are an important initiative for children's health and also help to change smoking behaviour.
- Laws and regulations are potentially useful levers for reducing exposure to cigarette smoke in other settings.
- Broader community awareness is important to reach community settings that are not covered by laws and regulations, such as cultural groups and sports teams.

How will other settings influence this?

- Current public feeling against smoking and increased public awareness of the harmful effects of smoking may reinforce efforts to address this issue.



Assessing the development of a skateboard park

What will be the effects on children?

- Children will be able to take part in a fun, safe and accessible recreational activity.

Will there be differential effects?

- Children interested in skateboarding or watching skateboarding would benefit most.
- More boys may use the skateboarding park than girls.
- The facility would need to cater for different age groups and skill levels and to be accessible by public transport.

How can we involve children in work on this?

Ways to involve children could include:

- asking them whether there is a demand and need for a skateboard facility
- asking them what a great skateboard park would need, such as toilets, parking, location near a bus stop and schools, lights for evening skating, drinking fountains
- asking them for ideas and involving them in discussions on design (the colour and style of equipment, physical layout of equipment) and location before design work begins
- creating an advisory group of children who are interested in skateboarding to establish the key specifications
- involving children in the park opening and its continued publicity.

What links need to be considered?

- We would need to consider the existence and location of other recreational facilities for children in the area (either planned or already in place).

What are the key settings to focus on?

- The key setting in this example is the local community. It would be vital to the project's success to get the community's support, particularly local children and groups working with children, such as schools and youth centres.

How will other settings influence this?

- Central and local government laws and regulations (eg the Resource Management Act 1991) would influence the park's development.
- Other settings such as peer networks could influence how much children use the park.

