Reforming child protection
Insights from Australasia

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Context: Political change and the public service

The public sector in Australia (Tingle 2015), and New Zealand, has undergone significant change in the past three decades

- The politicizing of the public service and ‘issues management’
- Employment uncertainty and the building of a ‘fawning culture’
- The public service as an overseer of contracts
- The loss of institutional memory

- Public service reform occurs within this dynamic and quickly changing environment
The context of child protection practice

- Mounting concern about levels of child abuse and particularly concerns about child homicide and serious harm to children

- Increased notifications of children at risk and a pressured child welfare environment

- High profile media attention

- Questions about how services are responding

- The hegemony of risk and rescue
The hegemony of risk and rescue...

You want a valve that doesn’t leak and you try everything possible to develop one. But the real world provides you with a leaky valve. You have to determine how much leaking you can tolerate.

(Saturn 5 rocket scientist, Arthur Rudolph)
Child welfare orientations

- Emphasis on universal welfare provision and early intervention
- Voluntary, flexible, solution-focused
- Emphasis on systems approach
- Emphasis on therapeutic

Hybrids

Family support (European)

Child protection (English-speaking)

- Residual and selective provision of welfare
- Legalistic, bureaucratic, investigative response
- Emphasis on risk, and particularly high risk
Reform efforts in English-speaking jurisdictions

The emphasis is often on how do we become...

...less vulnerable... to localised outbreaks of moral panic and to consequent knee-jerk policy formulation, which have serviced to both inflate child protection bureaucracies and subject their operations to yo-yo practices? (Spratt 2008)

Strategic, integrated responses could do it, but that doesn’t always happen
Five elements supporting successful child welfare reform

1. Organizational vision and leadership
2. Overcoming barriers to service quality
3. Knowledge-based organizations
4. Responsive services
5. Strong workforce
Five elements supporting successful child welfare reform

1. Developing the Vision

Organizational vision and leadership

- developing an organizational culture and a coherent vision based on what children need
- nurturing organizational leadership around the vision, and strengthening morale
- encouraging self-regulating systems
- shifting public perception - connecting people to the passion (and compassion) in the work
Alarming rate of child abuse in NZ, says report

THE PRESS

Saving our children

New Zealand's chief social worker, Steve Pilkington, says there is a legitimate public interest in the protection of children and the need for more resources for Child Youth and Family Services. Pilkington says the number of children removed from their homes due to abuse is increasing, and there is a need for more support for families. He says the current system is not working, and there is a need for more resources and support for families.

THE DOMINION POST

Children are crying out for our help

It wasn't the news everyone was waiting for, but it's the news everyone was dreading. The news that if Coral Burrows was still alive, there was only one thing she could do: kill herself, or her family. That's the news that was confirmed yesterday morning, according to the report. It was confirmed that there would be no miracle in the case of the girls who were last seen alive. They were last seen alive in the care of Child Youth and Family Services (CYF), who are in charge of investigating the case. The report also showed that New Zealand was one of only four countries whose child death rate from maltreatment was deteriorating, rather than improving. Yet this is also a country with the clean, green environment, where children should be safe.
Social workers thanked Armour of love girls CYF team for frontline duty

Unsung heroes in a young mum’s transformation

But his victim forgives

The unsung heroes

Course helped change Tokoroa teenager’s life

Hope reigns supreme for social workers

Antisocial behaviour never simple

Young teen turns his life around

Social workers take a bow for their hard work and dedication

Part of the solution

An inspiring leader

Fostering a rewarding challenge

Eastern Bay families are in good hands

Helping change lives

Walking down a different path

Young TALENT:oscope Marsh and his award PICTURE supplied

A 14-year-old boy did this...
Five important elements supporting successful child welfare reform

2. Overcoming barriers to service quality

- Shifting from a blame culture to one of organizational learning. In child welfare when organizations are in crisis mode, they develop or re-write operational policies urgently, defensively and with an emphasis on prescriptive control.
- Creating succinct, unambiguous operational policies that do not undermine professionally reflective decision-making.
- Move practitioners from their computers to the field.
- Create the space for staff to think about practice innovation and improvement.
Five elements supporting successful child welfare reform

3. Knowledge-based organizations

Articulating commitment to knowledge-based practice and providing a coherent picture of what it looks like is important

- Care and protection practice framework
- Youth justice practice framework
- Residential practice framework
Five important elements supporting successful child welfare reform

4. Responsive services

Creating service designs and pathways that are more responsive to what children and their families need.

Introducing a differential response system.
Five important elements supporting successful child welfare reform

5. A strong workforce

- Training
- Coaching – the importance of observed practice
- Support and protection
1. Organizational vision and Leadership: New Zealand

Transforming the lives of vulnerable children
A proposal to bring together the system around a common purpose

- An investment approach – a lifetime view of wellbeing with high aspirations for children that prioritizing long term outcomes
- Engagement of all New Zealanders, raising awareness, shifting attitudes and social norms, creating a sense of responsibility for outcomes
- A child-centred system where the funding follows the child
2. Overcoming barriers to service quality: New Zealand

- Move from a Social Welfare system to a cross-sector social investment system, tilting the system away from short term and reactive responses that are designed to just minimise harm, and moving toward prevention and remediation – responses that improve children’s immediate and long-term wellbeing
- Addressing the lack of evidence
- Maximizing earliest opportunities to make a difference
- Responding to a lack of a child focus and the need for a child-centred system that embeds the voices of young people in the design and delivery of services
3. Knowledge-based organizations: New Zealand

The development of an evidence-based learning system...

- Modernization of technology and channels over time
- Implementation of a full investment approach with an actuarial model and the data and data analytics to support it
- Investing in evidence-based interventions that make the biggest difference
- Developing a trauma-informed framework
4. Responsive services: New Zealand

A proposed new child entity

- Single point of accountability for vulnerable children – moving from a fragmented system to one that provides a complete response to children: A ‘Social Investment Department’

- Significantly expanded mandate, funding and governance – with an advisory Social Investment Board

- Independent monitoring at multiple levels, including an independent advocacy service for children and young people

- New leadership to create change in culture and to deliver new behaviours and outcomes
New Zealand: A proposed new department providing a single point of accountability
5. Strong workforce: New Zealand

The new operating model will require...

- New knowledge, competencies and skill requirements
- Access to a greater range of specialist professional skills
- Supporting the competency work of the Social Workers Registration Board
Victoria Australia
Reform: The Roadmap (2016)

1. Organizational Vision and Leadership: Victoria

Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children
  o Focus on prevention and intervening early
  o Continuity of care and service integration, localized services and local partnerships
  o Supporting connections – family, culture, community
  o Aboriginal self-determination, and building personal capacity to make choices
  o Evidence-based effective services
2. Overcoming barriers to service quality Victoria

The Roadmap: Strong leadership

- Enhancing governance and accountability mechanisms
  - Developing governance systems to lead and oversee improved outcomes for vulnerable children and families
  - Measuring outcomes at all levels of service delivery
  - Defining roles and responsibilities within the Support and Safety Hubs
  - An outcomes framework across all agencies

- Evolving funding models
  - Develop funding models that use investment strategies that deliver best results and encourage collaborative approaches
  - Develop an industry transition plan to support the required evolution of provider organisations to best deliver within the future system environment
3. Knowledge-based organizations: Victoria

The Roadmap: Building a learning system

- Commitment to evidence-based programs and practices
- Focus on outcomes
  - A new panel for shared research aimed at building collaboration, promoting innovation, sharing knowledge and overseeing practice development and change
  - Develop a children and families research strategy
  - Strengthen data collection mechanisms
  - Provide funding to support sharing of information
  - Improve data and information sharing
  - Develop a coordinated system analytics capability to support decision making
4. Responsive services: Victoria

Roadmap for Reform: Strong families, safe children

- Building supportive and culturally strong communities and improving access to universal services: place-based approaches including Support and Safety Hubs
- Wraparound supports and targeted early interventions
- Strengthening home-based care and improving OOHC outcomes
Responsive Services: Victoria

**Today**
- It is difficult to know where to get help or advice.
- Often people cannot get the support they need from places they trust.
- People are passed between statutory, crisis and community-based services.
- Statutory child protection is the gateway for many community services.
- Multiple assessment and referrals.
- Service fragmentation and waiting lists.
- Limited change and poor outcomes.

**Future**
- A visible, accessible place to get support in local communities.
- Greater capacity for universal health and education services to manage low-level risks.
- Single pathway for statutory, crisis and/or support services.
- Feedback and information sharing across services.
- Access to more timely and co-ordinated responses.
- Sustained change with better outcomes.

**Before**
- Pre-school
- Schools
- Police
- Maternal & Child Health
- Child FIRST
- Child Protection Intake
- Family Violence Service
- Health
- Housing
- Family Services/Child Protection
- Victim’s Assistance
- People receive disjointed support that meets some of their needs.

**After**
- Pre-school
- Schools
- Police
- Maternal & Child Health
- Information and advice.
- Feedback on statutory report.
- Visible entry point to services.
- "Service navigation" co-ordination of the service responses and monitors safety, connecting to specialist supports when needed.
- A 'support and safety plan' is created with the family (inclusive of any statutory plan).
- Family receives coordinated support from universal and targeted services.
- People receive coordinated and timely support that meets their needs and ensures safety.

\[\text{A} = \text{Assessment}\]
5. Strong workforce: Victoria

Building the capability and capacity of the workforce

- A long term workforce strategy identifying future workforce requirements and skills gaps to support the delivery of evidence-based interventions, trauma-informed care, multidisciplinary working across universal, targeted and specialist workforce
- Workforce learning and development strategies, plans and programmes, including improving qualification levels in key areas
- Developing practice frameworks that create practice consistency with diverse client groups
Reflections...

- Child protection is constantly experiencing review and change
- A professional workforce will support change that is based on professional values – rearranging deckchairs is fine but it's what happens on the ground that counts
- A clear vision and logical coherence across key elements of services system makes it less vulnerable to undermining external pressures
- Focusing on one part of the system can lead to unintended consequences elsewhere
- Things don’t happen overnight (creating difficulties for Ministers)
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