



7/7/2010

## New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women Inc

Whakaminenga Wahine o Aotearoa kua whiwhi Tohu

P O Box 6566

Dunedin North, Dunedin, New Zealand

**To: Hon Paula Bennett, Minister for Social Development**

Hon Tariana Turia, Associate Minister for Social Development

(Copied to Rt Hon John Key, Prime Minister and Rt Hon Bill English Deputy Prime Minister)

Dear Ms Bennett and Mrs Turia,

### **NZFGW Support for Early Intervention to Help Dysfunctional Families**

*The **New Zealand Federation of Graduate** (formerly University) **Women (NZFGW)** has more than 700 members in its branches nationwide. Formed in 1921, it is affiliated to the Geneva-based **International Federation of University Women (IFUW)**. Since its founding in 1921 (as NZFUW), NZFGW has established a strong record of active involvement in social, economic and educational issues at the national level and internationally through the IFUW which holds Official Observer status at UNESCO.*

### **SUPPORT FOR WHANAU ORA TYPE APPROACH**

At its conference in September last year the New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women adopted the following policy:

**The NZFGW supports intensive, early intervention programmes designed to improve the life chances of children born into the estimated 5% of New Zealand families who have shown high levels of dysfunction over several generations.**

This policy is based on a paper published by the Hutt Valley Branch of NZFGW in July last year. Its title is "Ending Intergenerational Dysfunction in NZ Families: The Importance of Early Intervention" A copy is enclosed. In particular we draw your attention to the summary on page 4. The paper is also available publicly on our website [http://www.nzfgw.org.nz/branch\\_news.html](http://www.nzfgw.org.nz/branch_news.html).

The suggestions that we noted in this report are similar those in the Whanau Ora proposals. Our organisation congratulates you for the initiative you have taken in launching the Whanau Ora (Total Wellbeing) project, designed to separate and facilitate the delivery of Strengthening Families programmes, including Family Start, to Whanau.

We note that the Prime Minister commented some time ago that he thought the Whanau Ora approach could become available for all New Zealand families.

This is of particular interest to the NZFGW in relation to the Hutt Valley study group's findings that, while it had considerable potential, all was not well with the Family Start programme for dysfunctional families.

### **PROBLEMS WITH FAMILY START**

1. Uncertainty as to whether changing to 'integrated contracts' and "funding for outcomes" has led to increased efficiencies inside the large, Ministry of Social Development bureaucracy
2. Doubts as to whether it is possible to achieve the necessary level of long-term commitment to Family Start in a large bureaucracy with multiple responsibilities.
3. A lack of quality evaluation and monitoring, which would allow Family Start to evolve positively as a result of evidence and experience
4. An apparent lack of focus on the training needed to support social workers in building trusting and respectful relationships with their client families
5. A high dropout rate of families from the programme, which is not conducive to achieving the best outcomes for the families or society.
6. The lack of sufficient funding for all of the above

As a result of these problems the study group saw the need to explore alternative ways to fund and deliver Family Start. The study group's preliminary investigation suggested that separating this complex long-term programme from the Ministry of Social Development was worth exploring further. See page 13 of paper. Achieving some independence from the Ministry and reasonable security of long-term funding could allow Family Start to be delivered to the target families in a more responsive and flexible way. It could also lead to a more efficient use of funding both for the Ministry and the organisations delivering the programme.

### **Whanau Ora**

The NZFGW believes the Whanau Ora approach has the potential to overcome the problems identified with Family Start. Some questions arise however which are relevant to the NZFGW's policy of support for comprehensive, targeted, early intervention in the lives of all families at risk of passing on their dysfunction to their children.

## QUESTIONS

1. How will the implementation of Whanau Ora for Maori families impact on the level of funding available for the further development of Family Start for non-Maori families?

We understand that more than half of families eligible for the Family Start programme are non-Maori. Although all families can access Whanau Ora services, we question whether it will be practical and cost-effective for Whanau Ora service providers to seek referrals for the Family Start programme from non-Maori communities. In our view, such families are unlikely to refer themselves to a Whanau Ora programme.

2. Are there any plans to move the funding and implementation of Family Start for non-Maori families out of the Ministry of Social Development into a more flexible independent body?

To bring an end to intergenerational dysfunction in New Zealand will require a long-term commitment from community and Government. The study group concluded that, in these circumstances, it would be worth considering an alternative model for the funding and delivery of the Family Start programme alone.

3. Since the Whanau Ora Governance Group will be responsible for delivering a large number of different programmes and services to Maori families, how will it guard against the danger of becoming too bureaucratic and repeating the problems it was designed to solve, with negative impact on the development and targeting of Family Start?

## RESEARCH PRIORITIES:

Research priorities are needed to provide a sound base for a long term commitment to targeted early intervention in dysfunctional families in New Zealand

Economic analyses carried out in the USA and Australia have shown that targeted early intervention in the lives of seriously disadvantaged children provides economic and social benefits to society, which far outweigh the costs of the early intervention.

Further analysis shows that the later the intervention the more difficult and costly it becomes to reverse damage caused to children by neglect or mistreatment. For more detail see pages 6-8 of the paper.

- 1 Is research being planned to repeat the above economic analysis using New Zealand data?

It is now accepted that a significant part of New Zealand's crime, mental illness and pool of unemployable people can be linked back to the early childhood trauma and neglect experienced by many children in seriously dysfunctional families. If these children can be more closely targeted, the result may well be better social outcomes for them and much less cost to society.

There will already be detailed, historical, family data available from Child, Youth and Family as well as detailed Court and Corrections data.

- 2 Has the Ministry considered the possibility of trying to match these databases in order to find if the CYF database can be used in a predictive way to better target assistance to young children at greatest risk before they become a permanent social and economic cost to society?

The NZFGW looks forward to the successful implementation of Whanau Ora. This would break new ground and have repercussions well beyond the Maori community.

It also urges the Government and other appropriate Ministries, through the Ministry of Social Development, to make greater use of the social and economic data available to provide a definitive New Zealand research base to answer questions about the effectiveness of targeted early intervention in intergenerational, dysfunctional families and to try to achieve closer targeting.

The NZFGW trusts that the matters raised in this letter will contribute to the search for ways to make the "transformative change" in the delivery of social services that you have called for. It acknowledges the work of the Hutt valley Branch in researching this issue.

Yours sincerely

Dr Dorothy Page  
President  
NZFGW

Dr Linda Robertson  
Public Affairs Convener  
NZFGW