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Experts in Uncertainty
Social Work in Child Protection

**A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of**

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Abstract

This research examines what motivates child protection social workers and the factors which support them to continue practicing in New Zealand's statutory agency, Child Youth and Family. Child welfare services are under stress with increasing workloads. The work is difficult and the hours are long. Workers manage ambiguity, uncertainty and they make judgments that no other agency or professional is called upon to make, within a system that requires them to constantly reassess priorities and Attracting and retaining workers in the child protection field of practice is a priority for Child Youth and Family.

The thesis examines the motivating factors which encourage a social worker to remain practicing in the statutory child protection field. Understanding and strengthening these factors may assist New Zealand's statutory child protection agency; Child Youth and Family to increase the capability, capacity and experience of its professional workforce. Two methods were used to gather information for this study; in-depth individual interviews and a focus group. An inductive approach was used to identify common themes and challenges.

The key findings of the research showed that the quality of supervision and the relationships with one's supervisor and other professionals are critical. Self-care is a priority for the individual and operational policies must be clear, concise and accessible. Business and social work values guide the leadership of the statutory child welfare organisation. Workloads need to be manageable. Services to Maori require re-investment. A culture of acknowledging and celebrating the achievements of the agency and its staff should be infused through out the organisation and the general public made aware of the efforts and hard work of these professionals.

The findings have identified that the needs of statutory child protection social workers are modest. Providing the systems that help sustain them in their role and ensuring the support mechanisms are operating will assist Child Youth and Family to recruit and retain a competent, experienced and resilient workforce to support and provide services to New Zealand children and their families.

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To my mother, Barbara Williams and my friend Robyn Hooper, you nurtured my spirit, encouraged and have supported me in all of my endeavors.

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Finally, to my brother who passed away 05 August 2006.

This is for you Hira

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Introduction

Statutory social workers deal with the most extreme situations affecting the wellbeing of children, young people and their families. They make judgments that no other agency or professional is called upon to make, within a system that requires them to constantly reassess priorities and risks (Brown, 2000: 14).

Over the past three decades there has been a constant negative portrayal of social workers and the social work profession in the media. Descriptors such as interfering do-gooders who are incompetent, bumbling and unhelpful have done little to increase the credibility of or attract people to the social work profession (Birmingham, Berry & Bussey, 1996). There is a national and international shortage of qualified social workers. New Zealand's child protection agency, Child Youth and Family [CYF], works hard to recruit and retain experienced and competent social workers. Statutory child protection work is at the hard end of social work and consequently likely to be viewed as one of the least desirable fields of practice. Therefore it is important to examine what attracts social workers to child protection work and to understand the key motivating factors which make these workers determined to want to continue to work in the statutory child protection role.

The issues confronting statutory social workers are among the most difficult that any social worker has to deal with. The work is challenging, there are no absolutes, it is high risk and mistakes are dangerous and costly (Brown, 2000:14). A statutory social worker in New Zealand for the purposes of this study is a person who is employed by the Ministry of Social Development in the service line of CYF to investigate child abuse and neglect and provide or organise services for children and their families on behalf of the state. New Zealand legislation defines a statutory social worker as a 'person employed under Part 5 of the State Sector Act (State Sector Act 1988, NZ), in the CYF service line of the Ministry of Social Development as a social worker (Children Young Persons and their Families Act 1989, No: 2, NZ [CYPF Act]). These workers give effect to the mandated responsibilities of the state to care and protect children and young people and to work with young people who have offended (Department of CYF, 2006). There are a number of functions

specified in the Children Young Persons and their Families Act (1989, NZ) that can only be delivered by a social worker employed by the state, for example child abuse investigations. In some circumstances social workers are required to take intrusive action such as removing a child from their parents in order to keep a child safe and free from harm. The decision to intrude into families' lives and take some form of action is carefully considered. The impact of these actions on the child and their family is never taken lightly. Such steps are not always appreciated or welcomed and there are occasions when social workers feel they are 'damned for taking action and damned if they do not' by the families, other professionals and the public.

There has been a high level of anxiety about the problem of child abuse as well as the increased investment in the child welfare systems both in New Zealand and elsewhere and this has placed child protection services under greater public scrutiny (Buckley, 2003). During that time the social work profession has been the subject of much public criticism and social workers, the system and individuals are blamed when tragedies occur. Many western statutory child protection agencies are described as indecisive, incompetent and over zealous. Social work staff are depicted as villains, bullies and they are said to be demoralised, and ill-equipped to deal with the realities that confront families. It is also widely accepted that uncertainty, ambiguity and fallibility is part of child protection work which is not understood very well by the general public (McMahon, 1998; Huntington, 2000). The public comment usually describes workers as too lenient or conversely too inflexible which results in the public displaying distaste and hostility towards the workers. This leaves workers vulnerable and open to be attacked and pilloried if a worker takes one false step either way (McMahon, 1998; Huntington, 2000). The continual shaming of social workers has also contributed to an international shortage of qualified experienced child protection social workers. The likelihood of this perception changing in the near future is extremely limited.

Statutory social work practice demands a capable and competent workforce which is resilient and committed to child protection. This thesis examines the motivating factors which encourage a social worker to remain practicing in the statutory child protection field. Notwithstanding the negative portrayal of child protection social work there is a significant number of individuals who choose child protection as their

preferred field of practice and remain working in this area. This is primarily because they consider this work to be important and they believe that their efforts make a difference to the life of a child and their family. These workers accept the role carries with it a high level of risk and that the organisational environment is turbulent and sometimes frenzied and chaotic. The mission of keeping a child safe and free from harm is more important to them. The desire to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable children over ride the desire to find employment in different fields of social work where the environment is more stable. The agency and the social workers do their best to provide a safety net for children who are at risk and families who need support. An important element in being able to achieve these goals is the existence of respectful and meaningful relationships with their community and other professionals. This principle was applied throughout this research project.

At the time the research was undertaken the researcher held a senior role in CYF. The role carried significant influence and extensive formal power. The imbalance of power was minimised by the researcher advising potential participants of the researcher's role in CYF and the process which they were able to use if they felt unsafe at any time. In order to address any concerns regarding the study or the researcher, the participants were advised the Chief Social Worker of CYF had agreed and was available to discuss any matters they wanted to bring to her attention. This did not occur. This process was noted on the information sheet.

This study has four sections: the literature review, research methods, voices and findings, and the final section: the discussion, conclusion and recommendations. Section one, has two chapters which present the literature review. Chapter One examines child protection systems from an international and national perspective. It analyses the environment in which a child protection social worker operates, investigates the attraction to the role and the support mechanisms which are important and which assist the worker to remain in the role. Chapter Two looks at resilience theory as it is used to underpin this study and the strengths and challenges of the child protection work are discussed and analysed. The themes provide an insight of the external and internal factors which affect these workers.

Section two consists of Chapter Three, which discusses the research methods and the processes utilised in this study. It was important to have the 'voices of social workers explain in their own terms and to tell it as they see it' (Patton, 1990:24). The qualitative method provided an opportunity to do this. The researcher believed it was important to actively engage with the participants and to be seen by them to take on the role of researcher. Therefore the process of *kanohi ki te kanohi* (having dialogue face to face) was used and this required the researcher to listen and hear their stories. The participants were active in determining where the interviews would take place. The information provided by the participants was rich, it was free and frank and open. The senior role of the researcher did not appear to inhibit participants sharing information.

Section Three is the largest section of the thesis and contains Chapters Four and Five. It represents the voices and findings of this study. The social workers described what motivated them and articulated the systems which both helped and hindered them in their day to day activities.

In Section Four, Chapter Six presents the discussion, conclusion and recommendations. It offers insight and the opportunity to Child Youth and Family to focus on strengthening the quality and availability of the support systems which are important to social workers. It also provides information that will assist the agency to recruit and retain competent, qualified and experienced social worker to provide services to vulnerable children in New Zealand. Chapter Seven presents the key findings and the recommendations from this study. This section completes this thesis.

Section One: Literature Review

Chapter One Attraction to Child Protection Work and Support Mechanisms for Staff

Introduction

The next two chapters examine the literature which relates to statutory child protection social work and public child welfare systems with a particular emphasis on the role of statutory child protection social workers, the environment in which they operate and the factors which support and motivate them to continue working in this field. The literature on child protection social work is extensive and it takes account of both the New Zealand context and the international environment particularly where it has relevance to the statutory child protection work system. The review was undertaken by searching books, journals, government documents and electronic publications. The review is structured thematically. The four themes covered in this chapter are: the attraction to the child protection role, the support mechanisms for staff, resilience and the strengths and challenges of child protection work. These themes provide a framework to discuss what is valued by social workers, the support mechanisms needed to nurture these values and the future sustainability of child protection social work given the political and volatile nature of the work. This chapter begins with a discussion of the context and background of child protection work in New Zealand.

Context and background

There have been a significant number of studies undertaken on child welfare and the environment in which statutory child protection workers operate. For the most part there is agreement that child welfare agencies operate within a complex environment (Schorr, 2000; Landsman, 2001; Tham, 2007) and the increase in the number of children being reported to statutory services continues to place enormous pressure on the resources of the child welfare system both in New Zealand and other western child welfare jurisdictions (Scott, 2006; Tham, 2007; Hyslop, 2007). Many writers have noted the increased intensity and scrutiny affecting child protection agencies. Over the past thirty years there has been a constant portrayal of these workers by the media, the public and politicians as interfering do-gooders who are incompetent, bumbling and unhelpful (Pecora, Whittaker & Maliuccio, 1992; Birmingham, Berry

& Bussey, 1996). Freeman, (1996) and Ayre (2001) challenge these negative vignettes of social workers and assert that the verbal and pictorial descriptors are hurting committed and skilled practitioners and in some instances abusing them, for example, when they are used as the scapegoat when things go wrong in overloaded systems. Scott, (2006) argues that one of the consequences of an overloaded system and the continual shaming of these professionals has contributed to an international shortage of qualified experienced social workers and that this precious resource is being wasted. Scott (2006) warns that this situation may soon result in the child protection system imploding.

Child welfare systems are labeled and depicted negatively and some writers portray the systems as demoralised, investigation-driven bureaucracies, ill-equipped to deal with the realities that confront families; a system that is confused about its purpose, facing a declining professional workforce and experiencing progressive disorganisation (Schorr, 2000; Barter, 2001; Scott, 2006). The crisis in child protection in New Zealand is depicted by Hyslop (2007:7) as having to 'manage absurdity (at pace) and as resources withered and demand grew the level of siege mentality, dysfunction and waste became a feature of the organisation [CYF] nationally'. The capacity of the child protection system and the associated core business focus across the public service in New Zealand created resource intensive and interminable squabbles between the Departments of Health, Education, ACC and Welfare on expending resources on at risk children. No studies were found that described child welfare agencies as effective and efficient, with personnel who were professional and competent and enjoyed the confidence of the public.

There is a significant amount of research acknowledging that responding to child abuse has become increasingly complex and the significant increase in volumes of child abuse notifications is an international phenomenon which subjects child welfare agencies to huge pressure, strains systems and overstretches the capacity of their staff (Pecora, Whittaker & Maliuccio, 1992; Birmingham, Berry & Bussey, 1996). The over extension of the child protection system has reached an extreme level (Scott, 2006) and the highly publicised reviews of child deaths adds further pressure to a system which struggles to cope (Jenkins, 1987; Buckley, 2003). The recommendations from these reviews repeatedly highlight the importance of

collaboration and communication with other agencies and professionals who work with children and their families (McLay, 2000; Laming, 2003). These reviews make it clear that the responsibility for child protection can never be owned by any one profession and affirm that often the failures in the child protection system are in part the failures of different professional groups to collaborate effectively together (Beckett, 2003; Laming, 2003). This argument is supported by Laming (2003) who suggests the child protection system has paths that interconnect and influence one another and many factors are outside the control of the social worker and therefore the worker is constrained in their ability to take action autonomously. However when the best efforts of a statutory social worker are perceived by the general public, politicians and key stakeholders to fall short of societal expectations, the agency and the social worker stands alone. They face significant negative political and public criticism and shaming (Mason, 1992; Brown, 2000).

The widening net of the child protection system captures large numbers of children. There is a general lack of understanding in society that not every child who needs support has to face an intrusive statutory intervention (Thorpe & Bilson, 1998; Scott, 2006). However the attention that child abuse and neglect has received over the past three decades has increased awareness and an acknowledgment that responding to child abuse notifications requires skilled intervention by trained professionals (Munro, 2002). Buckley's (2003) study on child protection practice in a statutory setting in the Republic of Ireland asserts that over time the definitions of child abuse have expanded considerably, to the point where it is acknowledged that not all aspects of abuse are visible or even measurable. In contrast Wise (1989:503) argues that child abuse is 'obvious and that once identified, renders itself open to the competent application of a clear solution'. Wise (1989) does however draw attention to the invisibility for example of emotional abuse and often the cumulative condition of some children and agrees that emotional abuse is difficult to detect. Taking this line further Buckley (2003) speculates that evidence or proof of the existence of child abuse has begun to depend on expert knowledge and also the quality of the communication of those who are involved with the case (Tomison, 2002; Holt, 2003).

Notwithstanding the complexities and risks that are associated with child protection work, the unintended consequences of political decisions and the ill thought through responses to tragedies, social workers and their managers continue to have a high level of personal dedication and passion for this work (McMahon, 1998; Scott, 2006, Hyslop, 2007). Powell (2003) makes the observation that the hours are long, the judgments which are required to be made are complex and managing the competing demands of home and work is an art. He articulates that social work is not an exact science rather it is a balancing act which requires skill and determination. Social workers who are attracted to this work are dedicated and committed to the mission of child safety and to making a difference in the lives of vulnerable children (Rycraft, 1994, Landsman, 2001).

The Attraction to the Child Protection Role

The child protection social work role is considered to be very difficult, unpredictable and at times dispiriting work (Franklin & Parton, 1991; Westbrook, Ellis, & Ellett, 2006). It has been articulated that keeping children safe is a prime concern in child protection social work. The workers who contribute daily to achieve that goal are often exposed to the traumatic and often brutal circumstances of their clients' lives. These workers are required to deal with ambiguity and contested debate. They are expected to be the experts in uncertainty and make critical decisions according to the most current knowledge they have of a case. These workers are at the sharpest end of social work practice and they have some of the hardest decisions, most contentious decisions that the state has to make (Stalker, 2003; Field, 2004).

Social work academics argue that social workers who select child welfare as an area of practice are committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and that the frustrations and hardships that can accompany employment in public child welfare are endured in an effort to afford vulnerable children a secure environment (Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2002; Casey Foundation, 2003). Samantrai's study (1992) found that social workers who choose to remain in child welfare work have an 'inclination to help others, a preference for child welfare work, appreciated the decent wage and the benefits this work provides'. Job security was also noted as a factor which attracted social workers to the role. The opportunity to take advantage of working in roles which did not tie them to a desk job, to job share and to be able to

transfer from one programme to another made the public welfare role attractive and satisfying. Samantrai (1992) also suggested that social workers who had been in the role for over 15 years stated their commitment to remaining in the system was to change it from within so that it could be more responsive to clients. The Rycraft (1994) and Vandenberghe (1999) studies recognised that social workers were influenced to remain in child protection if there was a connection and commitment between their mission and their values and that of the agency. The mission had to encompass a commitment to helping others, a priority of working with children, and a belief in the importance of child protection. The professional values of the social worker and those of the organisation and its culture needed to be a comfortable fit with one another. If this union can be achieved social workers tend to stay longer in this field. Aligned with this, social workers strived to find the right assignments to match their skills and interests. These studies also identified that child protection workers make significant investments both at a personal level and professionally in public child welfare.

In contrast Drake, Gautam and Yadama's study (1996) found that inadequate pay, tough working conditions, lack of recognition for a job well done, chronic stress, emotional exhaustion and overwork impacted negatively on a social worker wishing to stay in this role. Research undertaken by Dickinson and Perry (2001) cited worker burnout as the number one reason why these workers choose to leave child welfare. However, their study also found that those who did stay recognised the ability to form relationships with work peers and to discuss work related problems with them. A competent supervisor who supported, buffered and protected them from the day to day difficulties and ensured they did not become isolated and exhausted by the work helped retain these workers in this role.

Despite the difficult context and the risks that are associated with child protection work a social worker's personal commitment to child safety and a belief in the mission and values of their agency helps to nurture and sustain their commitment and motivation to keeping children safe and making a difference in their lives. The organisational and personal support which workers value such as quality relationships with peers, colleagues and supervisors assists in making the job both bearable and manageable and has been found to make a difference when considering

remaining in child protection work (Landsman, 2001; Ellis, Ellett & DeWeaver, 2007).

The Support Mechanisms for Child Protection Social Work

There are six sub-themes in this section: supervision, self care, relationships, technology, policies and training and each sub-theme discusses the support mechanisms which assist and sustain social workers in this role.

Supervision

It has been acknowledged that professionals need supervisory help to be objective about their work (Morrison, 2000). Social workers practicing in New Zealand are expected to work within systems of accountability, within the agency procedures and be accountable through supervision and also peer review (ANZASW practice standards, no date). The New Zealand Social Workers Registration Board's Code of Conduct (2005:7) also specifies in order to be a registered social worker in New Zealand social workers must 'seek and engage in supervision in professional practice on an ongoing and regular basis, and to utilise specialist or specific supervision whenever necessary as determined on a case-by-case basis'.

The literature contains a plethora of definitions on supervision. Rich (1993, as cited in O'Donoghue, 2003) argues that there is 'no single definition or theory to describe the meaning, methods or purpose uniformly on supervision. However what is common is the description of social work supervision as a process, activities and relationship(s) and the organisation, the professionals and the individuals involved provide its mandate'. The Department of Health, United Kingdom (1999:84) provides a precis of what supervision should include: a 'scrutinising and evaluation of the work carried out, assessing the strengths and weakness of the practitioner, and providing coaching, development, and pastoral support'. The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers also has a policy statement on supervision which has been incorporated into the competency assessment process.

Supervisors should be available to practitioners as an important source of advice and expertise. A number of researchers have consistently cited quality supervision as one of the primary reasons why social workers choose to remain in their child protection

jobs (Rycraft, 1994; Dickinson and Perry 2001; Ellis, Ellett & DeWeaver, 2007). Consultative rather than instruction or monitoring supervision was a preferred style of practitioners (Bednar, 2003). Continuous improvement in the quality of supervision was essential for practitioners as this was associated with higher job satisfaction and therefore influencing the decision to remain in child welfare. The supervisor strongly influences the worker's decision to continue employment with the organisation by helping them gain competency and confidence in their job (Rycraft, 1994; Cole, Panchanadeswaran & Daining, 2004). Ensuring that skilled clinical supervision is offered to social workers helps to foster good reasoning skills, challenges biases and provides opportunities for reflective practice. It has a positive affect on job satisfaction and organisational commitment and at its most potent supervision should be a process which empowers, crystallises attitudes, skills and knowledge which results in professional effectiveness. Most importantly supervision helps social workers cope with demands of the role, increases their level of resilience and their sense of competence (Morrison, 2000; Allen, Lambert, Pasupuleti, Cluse-Tolar & Ventura, 2004).

The supervisor acts as a buffer and ameliorates some of the effects of stress that accompanies the child protection role (Barak et al., 2001; Egan & Kadushin, 2004). Amrani-Cohen's (1998) study undertaken on 'resilience among social workers: a cross cultural study of Americans and Israelis' found however that the emotional support of a supervisor was not related to job resiliency. This finding was surprising. Possible explanations for the discrepancy proffered by the author was the cross cultural effects between Israeli and American social workers and also at the time of the study the 'emotional support of supervisors was not available as most were involved in their different roles and responsibilities such as administrative tasks there was little time to receive and provide the much needed support' (Amarani-Cohen, 1988:85). Similarly, Tham's (2006) study did not support the earlier studies of human service organisations that the 'quality of one's superior was an important factor in relation to job satisfaction and intention to leave. Notwithstanding Amrani-Cohen and Tham studies, the literature overwhelmingly supports the premise that quality supervision, a positive relationship with a supervisor and an effort by them to take an interest in a social workers' wellbeing positively impacts on the retention and

motivation of child protection workers (Samantrai; 1992; United States General Accounting Office, 2003).

Self Care

Child protection agencies which facilitate work-life balance, encourage flexibility, support supervisors to provide mentoring and guidance to their staff and recognise the value of these rewards are more likely to retain social workers. The support and camaraderie with colleagues also helped workers through difficult situations and provided them a mechanism to talk about their concerns, fears and dilemmas (Smith, 2005; Westbrook et al., 2006). Pouliot and Home's (2001) study noted that some workers made the strategic decision to change their networks thereby avoiding negative people and instead sought support from colleagues who helped them manage and decrease their work stress. Stress and burnout are closely associated with the child protection role (Geurts, Schaufeli & de Jonge, 1998; United States General Accounting Office, 2003; Westbrook et al., 2006).

The social worker's view of how their employing agency values their contribution and cares about their welfare is an important factor for them. The ability for workers to feel strong enough to say 'no' to excessive workload requires workers to be assertive and being responsible for their self care. An agency's commitment to work-life balance, reciprocity and social exchange assists workers do this. Westbrook (2006) and his colleagues explains that an agency's culture which promotes staff advocating for strategies that assist with self care does result in better services for children and their families. Other self care strategies which were identified as assisting with worker wellbeing were opportunities to periodically change roles, for example moving from investigating child abuse to care work, taking annual leave regularly and working reasonable hours (Samantrai, 1992; Bernotavicz, 2000).

In summarising the findings of numerous studies it was found that where agencies do commit to work-life balance, the employee is more likely to commit to the organisation, there will be less absenteeism and a decrease in the odds of leaving child protection work (Smith, 2005; Yoo & Brooks, 2005). Morrison, (1990) and Smith, (2005) present research which identifies that the responsibility for self care

should not be a substitute for agency care and the limitations of any individual must be a key consideration. The responsibility for work-life balance and self care belongs to both the agency and the individual social worker. Similarly other researchers describe the importance of social workers taking an active role in ensuring they keep a good healthy, balanced and active life style, create the time to eat well and reserve time to spend with family and friends. A break away from the work place is reported to create more satisfaction in a worker's personal and professional life (Wagner, van Reyk, & Spence, 2001; Omar, 2003).

The study undertaken by Barak, Nissly and Levin (2001) on antecedents to retention and turnover among child welfare and other human service employees found that work-family conflicts were central to turnover considerations. This study found that regardless of the conflicts experienced by workers such as high caseloads, workers' own professional expectations may lead to workers choosing to remain in their demanding roles at the expense of their own emotional health. Acknowledging this finding places a high degree of responsibility on the supervisor to monitor and challenge social workers to pay attention to their own wellbeing. Again in contrast to most of the literature, the Amrani-Cohen's study (1998) presents a finding which does not support the assumption that married people can receive support at home and share their work and life burdens with their partners. This study identifies that married social workers are in fact less resilient than their non-married counterparts. An explanation for this finding is the acknowledgement of the multiple roles married social workers face in their private lives for example, mother, father, cleaner and managing an intimate relationship places dual demands on married social workers which can make them less able to cope with the work stress.

Relationships

Relationships are an essential ingredient of child protection work. The ability to engage with others and maintain constructive relationships are vital and important components to achieving quality outcomes for children (Wilding, 1994). Social workers make significant personal and professional investments of themselves when they choose to practice in child protection (Landsman, 2001). Their relationships with family, friends and colleagues are also strong and vital source of support which assists them to cope with the demands and stressors of the work (Barak et al., 2001; Wagner, van Reyk & Spence, 2001; Ellis, Ellett & DeWeaver, 2007). Rycraft's study (1994: p78) points out, the relationship with colleagues is 'necessary support in times of difficulty, for recognition and validation and on occasions for socialisation and personal friendships'. This argument is supported by other researchers. Belonging to a team was found to be highly valued and the sense of belonging made their work more bearable (Samantrai, 1992; Wagner, van Reyk & Spence, 2001; Ellis, Ellett & DeWeaver, 2007).

Conversely, Dillion's (1990) study which was undertaken in a health setting highlights that some workers are more vulnerable because of the attitude and behaviour of some of their colleagues. This study reports that within a team a social worker can be met with collegial impatience. A newcomer can experience isolation and intolerance from their colleagues; their curiosity and insecurities and the trailing after staff as a way to learn can be viewed as a distraction rather than a learning process. This situation highlights the importance of the relationship with their immediate supervisor and the reliance on the supervisor for guidance and nurturing. The quality of the relationship with supervisors plays important roles in the retention of social workers (Landsman, 2001; Allen, Lamert, Pasupuleti, Cluse-Tolar & Ventura, 2004). Ideas advanced by Samantrai (1992:456) concludes that as long as the supervisor is 'experienced, supportive and treats the worker as a professional all other conditions could be tolerated'. In addition supervisors or team members can lead a process within the agency which recognises the intense and emotionally draining nature of the work and engages in activities such as debriefing and collaboration among workers in order to provide opportunities for sharing experiences and responsibilities (Kadushin, 1976).

As noted earlier, the findings of both Amrani-Cohen (1998) and Tham's (2006) studies did not support other studies of human service organisations which highlighted the importance of the quality of the relationship with one's supervisor when it came to job satisfaction and an intention to leave child protection work. While human relationships are critically important in child protection work what has also become widespread in child protection is the use of technology and computers to record information, maintain contact and communicate with others.

Technology

Technology can be a major support tool for child protection workers. It has become a mechanism which is used daily by social workers, for example to record case information, reporting and statistic gathering (Steyaert & Gould, 1999). The wave of information and technology applications, electronic networks, telecommunications and advanced decision-supporting data bases are increasingly being used in social work practice such as when doing risk and assessments and genograms (Cwikel & Cnaan, 1991). These tools are useful guides and care must be taken by the social worker not to default or replace their clinical judgments and decision making to these mechanisms. Social service agencies are increasingly relying on computer data to compile and report client information, to demonstrate outcomes for performance and accountability purposes, and to monitor and evaluate staff performance. The freeing up of social worker time provides the potential for increasing the quality and engagement with clients.

Technology is transforming the way services are delivered such as social workers engaging with clients and other professionals by email, participating in virtual meetings rather than face to face and communicating and seeking approval electronically for a case-plan or expenditure from superiors (Cwikel & Cnaan, 1991; Burton & van den Broek, 2006). The use of technology for the most part is used to support managerial goals. This impacts on the delivery of social services specifically the systems and processes such as timeframes for closing cases are being made to fit within a generalist manager framework rather than what is needed by a client. Kirkpartick and Ackroyd's (2003) study of organisational approaches taken by public sector managers to enhance performance identifies that organisational structure, standards and systems both influence and are shaping the deeper and

underlying values of organisational members. These values in turn relate to how organisations define their primary tasks, what is considered important priorities such as efficiency and effectiveness, principles for governance, the criteria for evaluation and what defines success. Social workers are questioning the standing of their professional values in the current statutory child protection system. Some believe social work has become merely the product of applied labour.

Social work and the prevailing culture are struggling with the centrality of technology in daily practice. Steyaert and Gould (1999) suggests that 'recording and information gathering has traditionally been perceived as tedious, of little relevance to direct service delivery and a distraction from expert practice'. Some practitioners have applied resistance to using technology as it is viewed as the domain of technicians and a tool for behaviourism and managerial control rather than a medium which reflects the values of the organisational context and social work principles and values.

One of the intentions of electronic recording was to promote accountability and consistency (Gelman, Pollack & Weiner, 1999). The profession does need to be mindful of the potential for the erosion rather than preservation of social work services. Moses, Weaver, Furman and Lindsey (2003) articulate the concerns of social workers particularly the use of computers to provide logical social work case-related decisions, that the computerised management information systems will reduce professional power within the agency, threaten the autonomy of social workers and compromise the privacy of the information (Gelman, Pollack, & Weiner, 1999). There are social workers who hold the view that computers are perceived as alien to the values of professional autonomy for social workers and the personal contact with clients (Bargal & Schmid, 1992). 'Opponents of technology argue that computerisation reinforces the worst most punitive aspect of bureaucracy for workers and clients and trivialises professional practice' (Moses et al., 2003).

Nevertheless technology and computerisation in social services is inevitable, the rate of change is rapid and as time passes it can be expected that the use of computers and that acceptance of computers as a tool will increase within the social work profession (Finnegan, 1996). Bewley, (1998) and Marshall (1997) pose an alternate view to the

negative reoccurring debate on the use of technology by social service agencies. They argue that the technology is not in itself good or bad rather the equipment itself is value free; it is the way it is used which can and does raises concerns. Technology can be used as a helping tool for social workers to gather systematic information about their clients and their issues in order to inform treatment planning. Social histories and clinical questionnaires can be very costly in professional time and administration. Frustration by the clients is felt if this information is collected repeatedly

Automating this process can be of assistance if the computer is used as an aid (rather than the decision maker) when interviewing and undertaking an assessment (Nurius & Hudson, 1988). Technology can also be supportive in assisting in the interpreting and synthesising a body of information. Practitioners can be confident the software provides a consistent framework to analyse the information, that the results will be reliable and thorough. Computer outcomes also have the ability to detect a response gap, inconsistencies and patterns. Users will need to be aware that the information computerised programmes utilise to provide outcomes are dependent on the quality of the information that is entered onto the system by the workers.

Other support possibilities for the statutory environment are the use of the technology to systematically monitor a client's progress and maintenance of their plan over the course of their treatment. A new concept in New Zealand is the bail monitoring tag that is worn by youth offenders in which the location of youths can be monitored from a central place. Computers are being used aggregate and provide evaluative information on projects and new programmes. The impact of the internet has been significant on for social work; it gives access to a diverse level of knowledge and information both educational and practical for social workers. Email has become the most widely used feature which allows for dialogue with individuals, colleagues, other professionals; global conferences are regularly held now over the web and is a source of current and new research findings and online support groups are becoming more of a mechanism for discussion, debate and support for social workers (Nurius & Hudson, 1988; Beder, 2005).

The use of technology is now embedded in most child protection agencies (Garrett, 2005). New Zealand's child protection system utilises technology. Statutory social workers are required to use the system. The potential for the profession to utilise and shape this resource to further enhance and support social work is firmly in the hands of social work professionals. The technology can provide current access to social work resource material such as journals. Workers have access to client files regardless of location and social work tools such as gene grams. Social work skills and values have to be integral to the formulation of policies and guidelines which direct how workers will use technology. Incorporating and acknowledging both social work and business values in policy formulation provides a basis to openly discuss tensions and enhancements to the technology platform and this may attract workers to utilise the system.

Policies

Zell's (2006) work on the child welfare worker and who they are, argues that in simple terms the operational policies, guidelines and procedures of an organisation help construct the culture, the environment and translate national laws and policies into programs and services. Other writers promote that operational policies should govern the operating systems for public sector ministries, such as child protection agencies. These policies are used to manage a number of organisational imperatives for example, to minimise errors, to prevent damaging outcomes both in respect of child safety, performance management, monitoring staff activities and efficiency gains for the organisation (Buckley, 2003; Tilbury, 2004; Rzepnicki & Johnson, 2005). It is argued further by Cross, Hardee and Jewell (2001) that these policies can be and are used as one of the determinants of how inputs to a system are deployed once organisational priorities have been determined for example, the criticality framework policy of CYF determines the level of urgency of a child abuse notification and the time allocated for the social worker to respond (criticality framework is a technical term used to define response timeframes for reports of abuse and neglect allegations specifically for CYF).

Ideally operational policies are generated with a view to complement and support quality social work practice with an understanding of the contextual environment and these policies be formulated from a critical analysis of evaluations, evidence based

research, best practice examples, through reflection of casework and perhaps to support public policy (Tilbury, 2004; Gilgun, 2005) and child protection workers should be able to have the utmost confidence using these policies.

Establishing detailed child protection policies and procedures are mechanisms which managers use to integrate changes either to services and programmes or performance agreements (Lynch & Gough, 2001). The view of a number of writers is that policies are used by managers to reduce accidents or incidents. The formulation of some policies is reactive and a defensive response to an incident or risk that may attract public or political attention (Buckley, 2003). The quest to be expedient and to fix a concern can lead to the establishment of more stringent guidelines which focus on compliance rather than on wellbeing outcomes for clients (Wells, 2006; Zell, 2006). However in the event that a tragedy occurs such as a child is hurt or dies, non-compliance with a policy ultimately leaves a social worker vulnerable and accountable for the tragedy (Jenkins, 1987; Zell, 2006).

In the child protection environment there has been a proliferation of detailed procedural guidelines, forms and assessment tools as well as related training. This has led to limiting worker autonomy, enhancing a social worker's accountability and advocating that these tools and guidelines provides them with a degree of reliability and better decision making (Munro, 2000). Following policies and procedures are often incentivised and are presented to social workers and other professionals in such a way that demands compliance, such as 'a high degree of protection from actions such as libel and requirements to maintain client confidentiality will be afforded' (Lynch & Gough, 2001:296). Conversely, Berridge and Brodie (1998) and Zell, (2006) argue that policy makers need to have an awareness of the negative views many social workers have of the system and of policy analysts.

These views may have an impact on social workers' practice decisions and on their willingness to comply with certain policies. If social workers believe that policies are not in the best interests of clients or are not underpinned with social work values the resultant compliance rate could be less than forecast or desired by the agency (Wagner, van Reyk & Spence, 2001; State Services Commission, 2003; Parton, 2005). The agency demands compliance with policy and procedures and any failure

to comply are considered mistakes and not to be tolerated (Egan & Kadushin, 2004; Westbrook et al., 2006; Collins, 2007).

In an effort to explain and rebuff claims that social workers are neglectful in their willingness to comply with policies, other studies have found that the role of a social worker in statutory child welfare agencies is subjected to frequent changes of policies with severe limitations of resource. This presents social workers with an ethical conflict whether to respond to the obligation to follow agency policy or to react to a client's need for support and assistance (Rees, 1999). In order to bridge the policy practice divide front line social workers should be given the opportunity to provide meaningful input into decision making and policy formulation and the necessary training to support them to implement changes. Policy draws on people, institutions and practice expertise; the formulation has to be rigorous when assessing alternatives, supported by argument and evidence (Bridgman & Davis, 2004). A simple and practical policy supports social workers in their role. Bednar (2003) contends that if this were to happen more frequently, social workers would be proactive and willing to engage in training and implement the policies in day to day practice.

Training

Quality social work education, training sponsored by agencies and the opportunity to engage in workshops on research, evaluations and practice excellence provides social workers with information, new research and current thinking across the social work spectrum. Extending workers' knowledge assists them to become confident in their role. If a social worker does not participate in regular professional development which broadens their skills and knowledge for example reading articles, this impacts on a worker's intention to remain in the role (Ellett, 2006). Balfour and Neff (1993) argued that the time invested in training and preparing workers for the role ultimately resulted in the agency retaining those workers. Zell's (2006) study of child welfare workers found that forty percent of the caseworkers described their agency as well equipped to deliver training and thirty six percent said their agency was lacking in resources for training workers. The study on retention and turnover among child welfare workers by Barak, Nissly and Levin (2001) concluded that the capacity in child protection agencies depended on its human capital and the skills, of their staff.

Therefore the provision of quality training is an important factor for the agency. In order to increase the capability and capacity of the agency it must invest in its people. It has been suggested that it takes a long time to develop the necessary skills in order for social workers to work independently and effectively and the retention of these workers will benefit the agency. Social workers will grow in confidence and master their area of specialism (Balfour and Neff, 1993; Barak et al., 2001).

There continues to be debate on the value of social workers benefiting from attaining a professional social work qualification in order to practice social work (Ellett, 2006; Perry, 2006, Whitaker & Clark, 2006). Evidence from a number of child welfare workforce studies in the United States found that fewer than 15% of child welfare agencies required social workers to hold either a bachelor or master degree in social work in spite of several studies finding that these degrees correlate with higher job performance and lower turnover rates amongst workers (Jones, 2002; United States General Accounting Office, 2003). There is vigorous discussion on whether or not formal training makes a difference to the quality, consistency and stability of services delivered by child protection workers. Some studies found that social workers who work in child protection and who hold BSW and MSW degrees have been shown to be positively related to the turnover and that a higher level social work qualification is necessary for effective job performance (Rycraft, 1994; Strolin, McCarthy & Caringi, 2003; Westbrook et al., 2006). Other studies went further and suggested that the presence of a BSW and MSW resulted in more positive outcomes for families and children in the public sector child welfare system and that a formal education in social work is the best preparation for child welfare practice (Dhooper, Royse, & Wolfe, 1990; Gansle and Ellett, 2002; Strolin, McCarthy & Caringi, 2003). On the other hand, other studies did not support the view that a formal social work qualification increased the tenure of social work staff. A number of studies found that qualifications were negatively associated with job retention and that social workers with a degree were less likely to stay in a child welfare role (Robin & Hollister, 2002; Smith, 2005). The reasons that were cited included social work staff felt hampered and frustrated in applying their skill and knowledge because of high caseloads, inadequate supervision, bureaucratic distracters and diminished child welfare leadership (Smith, 2005; Ellett, 2006).

Public child welfare agencies have long been a key training ground for social workers. The constant calls for better education, more training and qualified staff in response to critical reports and reviews reflect expectations that social workers will engage in professional development throughout their career (Mason, 1992; Brown, 2000). A commitment to continuing professional development increases worker confidence broadens their skills and builds their resilience to be able work in the child protection area (Dickinson & Perry, 2001; Strolin, McCarthy & Caringi, 2003). The Professional Social Work Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) and the Social Workers Registration Board expect practicing social workers in New Zealand to engage in continuing professional development as part of their commitment to the social work profession (ANZASW, 2003; Social Workers Registration Board, 2005). Training exposes workers to new research and trends, and broadens their knowledge base. Child protection agencies have to consider how to manage the challenge of needing to balance the benefits of releasing staff for training and managing the high volumes of work and the other priorities that accompany this environment.

Summary

Statutory social work is delivered in an uncertain environment that is filled with uncertainty and risk. It is important for staff that reliable support mechanisms are accessible (Stalker, 2003). Social workers' technical social work knowledge and their strengths, such as commitment can be utilised and accessed by other parts of the agency. The child welfare sector benefits when the agency collaborates with its workforce and proactively utilises social work expertise, worker resilience and tenacity to address the challenges and improve services for clients. The next chapter examines the resilience theory and the strengths and challenges of child protection work.

Chapter Two Resilience and the Strengths and Challenges of Child Protection Work

Introduction

Child protection social workers are exposed to a significant degree of traumatic stimuli and emotional distress (Regehr, Leslie, Howe & Chau, 2000). It has been argued that social workers who have resilient attributes are more likely to sustain the environment of child protection (Egan, 1993; Amrani-Cohen, 1998, Collins, 2007). This chapter examines the concept of resilience and the supporting strategies that assist social workers who work in this field to be resilient when responding to events or life challenges and to withstand and overcome difficult events. People are remarkably resilient and their responses to adverse events can be varied and wide-ranging. Reflecting on their reactions to events and learning from their experiences may assist in the development and implementation of strategies for addressing challenges in the future. The first section looks at the context, background and definitions of resilience. The theories and their relevance to social workers who operate in the child protection system are also examined. The chapter concludes with an examination of the strengths and challenges of child protection work. The themes are public image, leadership: management vs. social work, workloads, services to Maori and celebrating success. Strengthening current initiatives and utilising new and different strategies may assist in improving services and the faith and optimism that staff and clients have in the New Zealand child protection system.

Context and Background

Resilience theories are used in this study to assist in interpreting and clarifying the nature and context of child protection social work within a statutory setting and to understand how social workers remain in this role despite the many challenges and fears that accompany this work. Resilience is a trait which can help people face challenges and unexpected events that may occur in their lives (Garmezy, 1993; Masten, 1994). Proactively managing and nurturing workers' resilience by understanding the impact of constant stress and trauma on workers, encouraging strategies such as regularly reviewing caseloads can be used to ameliorate stress (Pack, 2004). The literature consistently portrays child protection work as complex

(Landsman, 2001; Buckley, 2003; Stalker, 2003). Social workers operate and manage within a context of ambiguity and uncertainty; they deal with conflict and distress and must often make judgments with limited information. Workers question themselves repeatedly and worry about whether they have done enough or conversely, have they done too much when intervening in a child's life (Stalker, 2003, Scott, 2006). Risk management has become a core element of the child protection role (Buckley, 2003; Laking, 2003) and not every social worker is able to sustain the pressure of constantly managing risk. Facets of child protection work such as caseload size, access to resources and political pressure can create too much stress for some workers. They may ultimately make the decision to leave statutory child protection work (McMahon, 1998; Munro, 2002; Westbrook et al., 2006). However other workers choose to stay in spite of the uncertainty and the volatile nature of the work: in fact some individuals thrive in the role (Malugani, 2001). These individuals proactively enhance their skills and knowledge, grow in confidence and have strategies for self care to keep themselves safe in order to follow their passion and work with families to keep children safe (McMahon, 1998; Munro, 2002; Beckett, 2003).

Definitions of Resilience

The literature is rich with descriptions of resiliency. Generally, resilience is articulated as an array of behaviours, circumstances and achievements. Resilience is the capacity of individuals to withstand considerable hardship, to bounce back in the face of adversity and to go on to live functional lives with a sense of wellbeing (Vaillant, 1993; Gordon & Song, 1994). Resilience is further defined as a construct representing positive adaptation despite adversity (Werner & Smith, 1982; Luthar, 2006). Garmezy, (1993:129) is most eloquent in describing a resilient person as having the 'power of recovery and the ability to return once again to the patterns of adaptation and competence that characterised the individual prior to the pre-stress period; to spring back does not suggest one is incapable of being wounded or injured: a resilient individual is one who can bend under adversity, yet subsequently recover'. The literature examines the resilience of various types of people such as vulnerable children, homeless men and social workers. Consistent themes in these studies refer to an individual's capacity to successfully adapt to change and stressful events and the availability of personal and professional support at critical times to steady the

individual should they need it (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak & Hawkins, 2002; Pack, 2004).

Conceptualising Resilience

Two studies were found that explored the concept of resilience among practicing social workers. Egan's (1993:111) study of social work with Aids patients described resilience as an intrapersonal capacity that reduces the tension which follows an appraisal of stress and coping inadequacy. This study identified that the influence of a worker's self and world view about the difficulty of the work impacts on a social worker's ability to cope. Added to this, the allocation of work to a social worker should be based on their skills, strengths and preferences in order to reduce stress and burnout. Social workers would benefit from understanding the impact and influence that intrapersonal resources, such as self mastery and self confidence have on their ability to cope with the work and the related stress factors. Ben-Sira (1985) whose work influenced Egan's study posits that engaging in an educational process to address this issue could empower workers to be proactive in taking care of themselves and to maintain good psychological health. In the event of having to confront a stressful event or face a traumatic situation their coping capacity will assist them to bounce back even if they perceive the demands of the role to be stressful and perhaps beyond their coping capacities.

Amrani-Cohen's (1998) study focused on resilience among American and Israeli social workers. This study defines a resilient social worker as an effective person who has a professional sense of efficacy and emotional strength (as opposed to emotional exhaustion). Amaran-Cohen found that in both countries resilient social workers were older, possessed high levels of job mastery and worked with lower levels of role ambiguity. Higher levels of job autonomy and lower levels of workload also contributed to high levels of resilience in social workers. This study is unique in that neither emotional support by co-workers or supervisors was found to be significantly related to levels of job resiliency.

Most studies which have examined resiliency in children, adolescents and adults reported that resilient people have a strong sense of belonging, supportive relationships with family, access to a wider family network, the presence of extra familial peer support sources, positive role models, for example, teachers or sports

coach who offers the individual their commitment, encouragement and support (Garmezy 1985; Gilligan, 2001) Children who have good cognitive functioning are able to deal with adversity or risk more positively than those children who do not have these attributes. The ability to problem solve and a willingness to learn and develop their skills and talents, for example, recreational groups such as scouts or cultural/ kapa haka groups [traditional dance and song] can assist them to deal with hardship or misfortune with some confidence. (Garmezy, 1985; Masten, 2001). When a child is feeling confident in their internal and external environment and they have a sense that things will work out they become more adaptable to unpredictability. Resilience is also strengthened by feelings of self worth and self efficacy, feelings of hope and meaningfulness in life, having talents valued by themselves and others. Positive role models help individuals strengthen their ability to be resilient by encouraging, and supporting them in their endeavors (Werner and Smith, 1982).

Saleebey, (1997:50) advocates there are 'personal qualities, traits and virtues that people possess and these positive characteristics or strengths are usually resources and assets within the individual or the context in which they operate'. Kumpfer's (1999) study on factors and processes which contribute to resilience suggest having such qualities as self directedness, confidence and internal locus of control tend to be expressed by an individual being persistent and having a greater determination which then positively influences their resilience. Lifton's in-depth study (1993:28) of the survivors of Hiroshima and the holocaust points out that the self is 'surprisingly resilient and the environment in which a person operates can affect they way they behave'. People expect their world to be understandable and meaningful and their life events to be manageable. However with the particularly accelerated pace over the past several decades there have been major threats to this stability, for example, restructuring of organisations and events such as wars. The unmanageable events and personal uncertainties are contexts in which individuals, in particular, social workers are expected to cope and manage. The notion of social uncertainty can still result in individuals presenting themselves as resilient. They find the strength to see life's many possibilities and they are able to respond to extremely difficult events (Green, 2007). Although people experience trauma, tragedies and threats in negative ways, contrary to what most people think, many individuals exhibit a sense of

determination and they usually adapt and rebound in a manner that seems quite remarkable in the light of horrific experiences (Kaniastry & Norris, 1999; Silverman & La Greca, 2002). The strength of an individual's beliefs and their spirituality helps to build their resilience and tenacity.

It has recently been argued that spirituality and cultural beliefs can provide strength and an inner resource when individuals are faced with adversity. People may call on their spirituality and beliefs for strength and guidance. The internalisation of spirituality influences an individual's sense of self and the way they interpret what they experience (Sermabeikian, 1994, Nash & Stewart, 2005). Spirituality can be argued to be a form of resilience that provides individuals with the ability to understand and overcome stressful situations. Being able to draw upon one's spirituality during a crisis allows people to find solace and strength as they navigate through stressful and taxing issues (Angell, 1998). The importance of beliefs and values is emphasised by Sermabeikian (1994) in her work on the spiritual perspective in social work practice. She argues that a person's spiritual beliefs and values are intrinsically connected to religious, philosophical, cultural and ethnic and life experiences. In a New Zealand context Maori from time to time may call on their tipuna (ancestors) or Te Ao (supreme being) to nurture and provide them with guidance and strength to face their fears and difficult situations. It is important that practitioners such as social workers recognise that a person's spiritual beliefs and values are connected to their philosophical, cultural and life experiences and that spirituality in a person's life can be a constructive way of facing life's difficulties. It is largely through the social interactions with others that people acquire beliefs about themselves and their place in the world (Best, 1954; Durie, 2003). Similarly social workers who work in the care and protection system need to have confidence in their skills and knowledge, to operate within a supportive environment, and be able to face uncertainty. These attributes will assist the workers to achieving successful on behalf of their clients.

Resilient Workers in the Child Protection System

Social workers who are employed in the statutory care and protection environment work constantly with ambiguity and risk (Stalker, 2003; Scott, 2006). Resilient social workers usually have a sound knowledge and a mastery of the technical

aspects of social work. Being resilient also helps to build their confidence to make judgments and decisions on behalf of their clients. A worker's confidence is enhanced when they have a comprehensive understanding of social work concepts, theories and they have a sense of mastery of the field. The resilient worker is able to cope with stress primarily by feeling competent and in control. They are also positioned well to manage and control the meaning of experience (Vachon, 1987). A worker's confidence in their skill can be strengthened by also having key support networks in the form of co-workers who offer emotional and professional support to moderate the effects of job stress and health-related strain for social workers. Co-worker and supervisory support provides a sense of security and the social worker has someone to turn to when they feel anxious or frightened (Wagner, 2001; Westbrook et al., 2006). In a statutory context job satisfaction was noted as being at its highest when social workers perceived their jobs were contributing to the wellbeing of children and also when they felt and received emotional support from co-workers and supervisors (Samantrai, 1992; Smith, 2005).

Operating in a supportive environment is crucial for these workers as it is this that assists them to manage the daily stress of the role (Egan, 1993; Pack, 2004; Ellis, Ellett & DeWeaver, 2007). Jones, Ferguson, Lavalette and Penketh, (2003) argue a supportive environment is not always accessible to child welfare workers and they assert that social work is now shaped by managerialism, by the fragmentation of services, by financial restrictions, by increased bureaucracy and workloads. These trends have long been present in state social work; they now dominate the day to day work of front line social workers and shape the welfare services that are offered to clients. A study on the effects of emotional support of job and health-related strains in El-Bassel, Guterman, Bargal and Hsien-Su (1998) found that those workers who reported a high level of emotional support from co-workers and supervisors also reported less stress, anxiety and irritability as well as reduced emotional exhaustion and increases in personal accomplishment. A supportive family and social networks significantly contribute to worker resiliency (Bargal & Guterman, 1996). These findings were not supported in Amrani-Cohen's (1998) study where she found that emotional support by co-workers or supervisors was not significantly related to levels of job resiliency. These findings revealed that marital status or the support workers received at home did not assist them to be more resilient. One argument for

this finding is that perhaps the extra burden of family made them less able to cope with work stress. Pack (2004:25) found that some partners decided to 'flag the relationship and look elsewhere to meet their emotional needs for connection' as the demands of being politically aware and correct were seen to be just too hard. Partners who experienced being constantly admonished for engaging in conversations and making comments that were not always considered appropriate, such as saying a client should just get a job was too difficult to sustain over time.

There are many challenges that are faced by workers as consequence of operating in this environment. Many of these stem from the nature of the work: for example, the emotional burden of working with abused children or fear of a child dying on their caseload (Field, 2004; Westbrook et al., 2006). The resilient social worker copes with stress through feeling competent and confident and by controlling the meaning of the experience and utilising their coping abilities to support the primary goal of child safety and making a difference in the lives of vulnerable children (Kobasa, 1982; Vachon, 1987). Operating within this context and managing the varying degrees of complexity does require these workers to have strategies and tools which assist them to meet the challenges, recognise the strengths in situations and respond positively to these opportunities.

The Strengths and Challenges of Child Protection Work

This section examines the challenges of working in the child protection environment. These are well documented and can be viewed as disincentives to work in this area (Smith 2005; Tham, 2007). However with every challenge there are opportunities and strengths and capitalising on these can benefit the organisation, staff and the child protection system. Therefore consideration of these options such as improving public awareness of child protection may be of assistance to these workers in their role. The key themes discussed in this section are: public image, leadership: management vs. social work, workloads, services to Maori and celebrating success.

Public Image

The child welfare system has been heavily politicised over the past 30 years. During that time the social work profession has been maligned, it has been the subject of much public criticism and the system and individuals are blamed when tragedies

occur (Buckley, 2003; Jenkins, 2004; Scott, 2006). Many western statutory child protection agencies are described as indecisive, incompetent and over zealous. Social work staff are depicted as villains, bullies and they are said to be demoralised, and ill-equipped to deal with the realities that confront families. Commentators such as politicians, and key government officials, for example, treasury and the judiciary portray the system as being confused about its purpose. It is complex system where ambiguity and fallibility is part of the work and this is not understood very well by the general public. The likelihood of this perception changing in the near future is extremely limited (McMahon, 1998; Huntington, 2000).

The reporting of fatal child abuse cases continues to feature in headlines. There are constant attacks made against social workers or their managers; their professional competence repeatedly questioned. These attacks are not in the first instance conducted through the civil court but rather it takes place in the court of public opinion (Harris, 1987, Buckley, 2003). The argument that child welfare workers have to make decisions in a context of ambiguity and contested debate is not considered at all by the public debate when things go wrong. The media contributes significantly in the public pillorying, shaming and abusing of child welfare workers (Buckley, 2003; Scott, 2006). This practice by the media and other by-standers occurs when a tragedy happens and often social workers have little or no recourse to respond. Their voices are often muffled or drowned out by other experts who dominate the discourse (Kadushin, 1987; Huntington, 2000). The public commentary describes workers as too lenient or conversely too inflexible which results in the public displaying distaste and hostility towards the workers. The threats to workers and to the agency have been real, the fear of exposure in the press and TV, threats of inquiries, disciplinary action and loss of professional reputation further isolates workers and results in defensive practice or decisions to leave child protection work (Harris, 1987). At the time when the media frenzy is taking place there is limited comment or concern regarding the bind that workers must balance between the interests of the child and the privacy and autonomy of the family. This dichotomy leaves workers vulnerable and open to be attacked and pilloried if a worker takes one false step either way (McMahon, 1998; Huntington, 2000). The facts as they are presented according to Buckley (2003:10), serve as 'depressing reminders of the complexity and fallibility' of this work. There are however rare

occasions when the media takes a positive approach to social work and there are publications of feature pieces which discuss the positive outcomes of social work intervention (Irvine, 2007).

In order to balance the strong sense of unfairness regarding the image of child protection other writers have articulated that child protection workers do have a high estimation of the importance of their work despite the social work profession being considered as an ambivalent occupation in modern society. The role occupies the lowest rank among professionals (McMahon, 1998; Beckett, 2003). The status that social workers once held by society as respected experts of the child welfare field has diminished over time. In my experience that other professionals such as lawyers and psychologists have been able to step into the role of expert and provide advice and public comment with minimal challenge from social work professionals and this may have impacted on the esteem of social workers. The child welfare debate is comprised of many professional voices which focus on different issues and solutions (Esposito, 1985). It could be argued that the void which is left by the lack of consistent public comment by social work professionals gives credibility to the tarnished reputation of the profession. The opportunity lies in the nature of the work and the acknowledgement that the work of child protection staff is not always welcomed by clients or seen as necessary by observers of the system (McMahon, 1998; Stalker, 2003). The work is expressed by some as dirty work and that the work that has to be done is distasteful. Unfortunately there is little or no public social work voice challenging these comments (Esposito, 1985; McMahon, 1998). The public opinion which demands that child deaths or scandalous events should never happen again (Beckett, 2003) carries with it expectations that there are 'suggestions of unlimited and unrealistic potential for dealing with and preventing child abuse and more child deaths' (Buckley 2003:10). The potential to promote the work as it really is and to showcase the work of staff including the unpalatable segments are opportunities that management and those in leadership roles may highlight in order to improve the profile of child protection work. This is in contrast to having committed staff being portrayed as do-gooders and irritants that meddle and are mostly unwelcome in people's lives. New Zealand's child welfare agency actively engages with media and publication outlets to promote the work of the agency. Information and commentary on social work activities and outcomes are also

provided by CYF for publication and this allows for a balanced perspective to be presented to the public.

Leadership: Management vs. Social Work

Leading and being an active member of the leadership team of a child protection system presents many challenges for its members. Balancing all of the competing demands is almost impossible. However there are many positive outcomes which occur in child welfare which are so often hidden from the public scrutiny. The strengths and commitment of child protection staff such as courage and passion, is available to be utilised to support this work. Being a leader in a child protection system is not an easy role and despite the best efforts of the team, satisfying the stakeholders is often unattainable. Two significant drivers in the last two decades have impacted on how both international and national child protection agencies would be led and managed in the future. Firstly, agencies would increasingly use performance measurement to demonstrate their commitment to improving efficiency and effectiveness and accountability. Secondly, child deaths and the perceived failures within the system would re-shape the work, the culture and philosophy of child protection (Tilbury, 2004; Hyslop, 2007). These drivers have become visible in child welfare agencies in different guises. New Zealand has a sophisticated electronic system of reporting performance which is scrutinized and monitored daily, weekly, monthly quarterly, bi-annually and annually. Many local authorities began introducing detailed procedures for their workers to follow (Harris, 1987). Increasingly the reporting and monitoring processes are being refined to demonstrate effective and efficient use of public funds (Tilbury, 2004). The economic policies in the 1980s in New Zealand which were based on the influence of market forces (Douglas & Callen, 1987) impacted significantly on New Zealand's child welfare agency. The New Zealand public service proactively conscripted willing managers eager to do their corporate duty and lead agencies towards being more efficient and profitable organisation (Rees, 1999).

There was also a growing premise that 'efficient' and 'profitable' meant that an agency had to produce more services or products for less resource more for less was considered to be successful. In order to address diverse problems in any context, managers therefore needed to have generic management experience. New Zealand's

child protection agency experienced the leadership of a number of individuals whose expertise were in managing organisations such as a harbour and port, benefits and pensions and land and surveyors. This direction resulted in the establishment of a culture within child welfare organisations which was authoritarian and compliance driven. The influence of social work professionals, the ability to enjoy professional autonomy, utilise their expertise and form judgments was seriously limited and perceived as alien to the goals of efficiency. Social work professionals could be treated as a hindrance to the achievement of organisational goals rather than the organisation's technical experts (Morrison, 1990; Vandenberghe, 1999). In Britain a Hospital Trust chairman advised newly qualified doctors that 'their first duty was to the organisation, secondly to themselves and only then should they discharge third responsibility to their patients'. This kind of directive to professionals' has insidiously made its way into social work. Efficient and economical processes to achieve outcomes for clients were considered to be the more effective by generic managers (Rees, 1999). The preoccupation with monitoring, checking and surveillance by the agency leaders has done little to engage social workers in a conversation which may result in the two disciplines having a collective commitment to achieving organisational and professional outcomes for the agency as well as the clients (Jones, 2001; Bednar, 2003).

The literature does however emphasise that frontline workers mostly trust and feel supported by their leaders at a local level. Local management is viewed as flexible and understands the day to day experiences of social workers and that local management acts as a buffer to the interference of their work in the local office and the 'constant demands and criticisms for the state' (Westbrook et al., 2006:52). A number of current administrators began their careers as social workers. They choose to make the transition from being a direct service social worker to human service managers. Adequate preparation and training were identified as vital in order to provide the best chance for these workers to be successful in the administrative role (Patti, 2000; Hopkins & Hyde, 2002). Where there was the blending of social work and business management skills social work staff reported confidence in their local managers to solve local issues. They felt supported in their work, listened to and their opinions were given weight when making case decisions. This was not the case for the state or National Office administrators and policy makers (Wells, 2006;

Westbrook et al., 2006). Lawler (2007) believes the shift in the 1980s of the role of manager and the right to manage was significant and impacted on relationships.

Previously the social work profession and the bureaucracy coexisted relatively harmoniously. The consequence of the business managers taking a more authoritarian role led to the consequent demise of intrinsic motivation for social workers and the autonomy of frontline staff (Harris, 1998; Kirkpatrick, 2003). Social workers concentrated on their cases and issues such as the increase in demand for social work services and the difficulties in attracting experienced staff became a business concern. The consequence of workers taking this stand was that the overwhelming volume of child abuse notifications being reported which the CYF became publicly visible. In New Zealand reported cases of child abuse and neglect where the agency is not in a position to respond has been labeled the 'unallocated' case list. At its peak New Zealand's child protection agency had over 4500 unallocated cases (Brown, 2000).

Workloads

One of the critical challenges for western child protection agencies over the past two decades has been the increase in the demand for services and meeting public expectations for current and responsive services for at risk children. New Zealand responds to and manages approximately 45000 reports of child abuse and neglect in a year. The volume of child abuse and neglect reports presents a major challenge for all managers in the child welfare system. Reports of the over-extension of the child protection system are evident in the escalating number of child protection notifications in Australia and New Zealand (Brown, 2000; Scott, 2006). The over-extension of the child protection system is extreme in other countries (Korbin, 2005; Scott 2006). Schorr, (2000) supports this and argues that the issue of declining resources relative to increasing need, deteriorating social work skill levels and low staff morale has led to child welfare agencies continuing to experience progressive dis-organisation. Scott (2006) observes in her paper 'Sowing the Seeds of Innovation in Child Protection' that because of the demand pressures, child protection systems are forced to develop gate keeping mechanisms and as a result, are at great risk of social work becoming a de-professionalised workforce as a way of managing the demand. In line with other writers she predicts that services to

children will become more and more proceduralised (Ayre, 2001; Westbrook et al., 2006). Van der Walt (1993) asserts that the burden of these conditions inevitably falls on the shoulders of front-line social workers and when things go wrong no account of the system or work pressures are accorded to the agency or the adequacy of agency funding to address the increase in work volumes.

The Child Welfare League of America (2004) recommended social workers' caseloads should be set at 12 active cases per month. The Oregon Project (Emlen, Lahti, Downs, & Downs, 1977) was successful in achieving a maximum caseload of 15 cases per worker when working in permanency or the foster care area and this was consistent with CWLA's caseload recommendations of 12-15 children per worker in foster care. In 2006 a New Zealand report on youth justice specified that a social worker who has worked primarily in the youth justice area should have up to 18 cases at any one time (Hema, 2006). No documentation was found which specifies a maximum caseload for care and protection work. CYF reported to the Social Services Select Committee on 02 March 2006 that nationally the average caseload for CYF social workers was 18-20 cases (CYF, 2006). A significant number of these children are Maori. The Ministry of Social Development confirms Maori children are more likely to be assessed as abused and neglected than non-Maori children (Ministry of Social Development, 2006).

Services to Maori

A constant challenge for New Zealand and CYF is the over-representation of Maori children and families in its child welfare system. Opportunities to respond to this challenge have been supported by numerous injections of financial support by government and effort by staff attempting to reduce the numbers of Maori children who come to notice of the statutory agency. Addressing the over representation and the length of time a Maori child remains in the child protection system continues to be a challenge for the leadership team and the staff of the child protection agency. The over representation of indigenous families is replicated in most other western jurisdictions, such as Australia, Canada and the United States. Furthermore this situation has endured despite many government initiatives over the years to reduce the number of minority ethnic children coming to the notice of the child protection system and being taken from their families, placed in non-kin placements and

remaining for significant periods of time in foster care. There is a desire and willingness at the political and operational level to change this statistic however achieving tangible results has proved to be difficult (Morton, 1998; Hill, 2001).

Hill's study (2001) of the 'Disproportionality of minorities in child welfare' explains that the persistence of this fact can be argued from two perspectives. One view is over-representation of these children may be viewed as appropriate since minorities have higher levels of poverty, single-parent families, poor health statistics and joblessness and that they are perceived to be at greater risk of child maltreatment and in greater need of child welfare services than non-minorities (Pelton, 1978; Bartholet, 1999). Another view however considers that over-representation is an issue since the minorities are not believed to maltreat their children any more than Caucasians. There is strong advocacy by those who support this position that systemic changes are needed to be made to child welfare policies and practices to reduce the disproportionate numbers of these children being caught in the child welfare net (Holton, 1990; Hill, 2001). Morton (1998:1) questions the 'increasing colourisation of the American child welfare system' and suggests this can be attributed to a number of factors such as the cultural competence and the responsiveness of the child welfare system to ethnic minority families. Addressing the over representation of first nation children and families in the child welfare system suggest there are both challenges and opportunities to be considered that would result in improving the negative statistics. There is an opportunity for the leadership team to consider targeted recruitment and retention of first nation's social workers and cultural awareness training for staff.

The New Zealand child welfare system has had the benefit of a number of reports, legislative changes and the Treaty of Waitangi which acknowledges the status of this country's first nation people and outlines responsibilities, accountabilities and expectations of state welfare agencies when engaging with Maori families (Department of Social Welfare, 1988; Department of Child Youth and Family, 2001). These reports specify the government's expectations and its commitment to bi-cultural practice. These reports set out the requirement of the state to work in partnership with Maori to support them with initiatives to improve their wellbeing. The Children, Young Persons and their Families Act, (s5:1989, NZ) provides

direction to the child protection community to 'have regard for the values, culture and beliefs of Maori people and to support the role of families and family groups'. The CYP&F Act (NZ, 1989) also provides the mechanism for Maori to deliver services in their own right as an Iwi or a Maori Social Service (Doolan, 2005). The progress by the state agency to utilise the potential of Iwi in a social service setting has been very slow and history documents the many attempts and confirms all of the failures by CYF to support and nurture the sustainability of these services (Brown, 2000; Tomlins-Janke, 2005). This situation presents options and challenges for CYF and the opportunity to re-engaging with Iwi as an equal partner in the discussions (Munford & Walsh-Tapiata, 2005).

There are a number of examples where Maori and the New Zealand government have worked in partnership to achieve positive outcomes for children, such as when the Family Group Conference model, an indigenous model of planning for children was enshrined in New Zealand's child welfare system and legislation (Walker, Allan, Featherstone, Hewitt, Keith, & Smith, 2000; Dyson, 2006). Notwithstanding the negative aspects of New Zealand's child welfare system, New Zealand is recognized as having world leading child protection legislation and the family group conference is internationally recognised as best practice. Maori concepts of family and the decision-making rights of family have been replicated in numerous international jurisdictions such as USA and Ireland (Pennell & Anderson, 2005; Dyson, 2007). New Zealand received an international award in 2007 which recognised and celebrated the family group conference. Dyson (2007) celebrated New Zealand's success and commented that 'FGC origins are uniquely New Zealand and because of its success it has been adopted and adapted as a best practice model in more than 20 countries world wide'.

Celebrating Success

Seizing opportunities to celebrate the successes as well as the innovative and creative actions of staff requires enthusiasm and persistent effort by everyone committed to child protection work. Official recognition of the Family Group Conference by the international social sector has taken almost 20 years. Harpak (1990) urges leaders and managers to take time to celebrate the successes. This is important to do particularly for the workers. Research undertaken by Westbrook, Ellis and Ellett

(2006:57) which investigated the insights and experiences of the committed survivors of child welfare highlights the importance of ‘personal recognition for hard work and success’. The findings stress that building both formal and informal structures to communicate appreciation of employees’ contributions to the organisation and their exceptional efforts are important for workers. Further to this Westbrook, Ellis and Ellett (2006), suggest that sharing information which highlights the efforts and successes of staff through various mediums are opportunities to communicate the value of social work to the organisation and to the community (Gibbs, 2001; Collins, 2007). Local management could also strengthen and increase employees’ commitment to child protection and to the agency by providing frequent, informal feedback to their staff for example, personal comments from them about workers’ efforts and the high quality of their work (Landsman, 2001). Taking the time to recognise staff and be seen to value their expertise and commitment to child welfare may contribute to social workers choosing to remain working for the child protection agencies.

Summary

This review of relevant literature provides a panoramic view of the child protection landscape which is comprised of positive and negative elements. A number of the issues were raised by the participants and these will be addressed in the analysis and discussion chapter.

The commitment of dedicated social work professionals is the system’s greatest strength and could also be its greatest risk. The willingness of these individuals to navigate the terrain on a daily basis demonstrates their commitment to the mission of keeping children safe and wanting to make a difference in a child’s life. The support that is valued by these workers is not unreasonable. The requests for quality supervision, the support of colleagues and enough resources to do an adequate job are manageable expectations. There are many challenges for the leaders of the child protection system to consider. However an argument can be made that equally there is also a myriad of opportunities that can be utilised with minimal impact on fiscal resources. The literature acknowledges that the child protection system requires a number of skills in order for it to operate effectively for example, business management, relationship and technical social work skills. All these disciplines are

currently active in the child protection system. The staff, the children, their families and other social service agencies require these skill sets to work together harmoniously in order to provide the clients a quality and safe service. The next chapter describes the research methodology and methods utilised in study.

Section Two: Chapter Three Research Methods

This chapter describes the qualitative approach and the process taken in this study using two interview methods of data collection to examine the central question of what factors motivate and influence the retention of experienced social work staff in the statutory child protection role. This approach enabled exploration of perceptions from participants according to length of experience and practice, and social work leadership roles. These groups also had a diverse range of age, mix of gender, ethnicity and respondents were located in both urban and provincial office settings. A profile of the participants is presented later in this chapter.

Research Process and Methods

Social research is defined by Somekh and Lewin (2005) as being concerned with people and their life context. It relates to the nature of knowledge, truth and values which underpin human judgments and activities. Other writers have defined social research as focusing on people, individuals and groups and their behaviour within cultures and organisations and as a tool which helps understand and describe the world of human experience (Kemmis, 1980; Myers, 2000). New Zealand researchers, Munford and Sanders (1999:12) have recognised the importance of literature and research and having an understanding of the impact that contextual factors have upon the helping relationship. They conclude that a contextualised approach to families provides a valuable framework through which responsive and reflective services for families can be delivered. Doolan (2003) reflects his view on the importance of selecting the research method that will provide a broad understanding of the size, shape and an in-depth understanding of contributing factors of the subject. These definitions are relevant to this study which aims to discover what can be learnt about social workers' values and beliefs and what influences their decision to remain employed in the child protection field. It was important to have the voices of social workers explain 'in their own terms and to tell it as they see it' (Patton, 1990:24). The research has the potential to contribute new information and knowledge and to create change in the statutory child protection environment. In anticipation that the demand for qualified social workers will continue to increase, the experiences of these participants can be used to strengthen and initiate change in the organisational and environmental setting. A strategy which

captures the hearts and minds of social workers for child protection work may lead to the retention of more experienced social workers in this field and in so doing boost the capability of New Zealand's child protection agency so that the public and key commentators have confidence in statutory social workers.

The choice of a focus group and in-depth open-ended individual interviews as methods was considered appropriate to access the 'rich seam of data' and the 'vessel of answers' from these participants (Watson, 2006:369). Meaningful engagement is a core social work attribute and valued by social work professionals (Reder & Duncan, 2003). The principle of *kanohi ki te kanohi* (having dialogue face to face) also provided the opportunity to meet the participants and address any concerns regarding the formal power and senior role of the researcher at the time of the study. This enabled the researcher to meet the participants at their choice of venue, present the objectives of the study and to respond in person to any queries or fears. The personal exchange provided the opportunity to present the context for the study and encourage free and frank dialogue.

Individual Interviews

Patton (1990:278) contends that open-ended interviews help draw on the perspectives of others. The purpose is to find out 'what is in and on someone else's mind' and it also provides a way to learn from respondents what can not be directly observed such as feelings, thoughts and intentions and to enter and access their perspective. The use of individual interviews has been articulated to be a much broader way of bringing together and capturing the multiple views of people. It is described as 'the most flexible of the research instruments' (Barbour & Schostak, 2005:43). The open-ended questions provided a way for the data to be systematic and thorough for each participant, it allowed for individual variation (Patton, 1990:283). The interview has been described by (Watson, 2006:372) as a process of 'mining, refining and surveying, or distilling' for information that is a reality but has been obscured and that the process of the interview will assist in removing some of the barriers to reveal the 'real self'.

Interviewing as a method of data collection does have a number of weaknesses which require consideration. This list is not exhaustive however for this study these were

factors that were given serious consideration. Firstly, the data is difficult to replicate, the researcher is dependent on the participants being honest and comfortable about providing the data, the data can be open to interpretation and the information can cause discomfort to the researcher. The integrity of the study is dependent on the ability of the researcher to be honest and control bias (Hughes, 1996). Interviewing can also be time consuming and expensive and the requirement to manage these aspects may impact on the breadth and quality of data.

Focus Group

Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) defined group interviewing to be 'limited to those situations where the assembled group is small enough to permit genuine discussion among all its members'. Krueger (1988:18) describes a focus group as a 'carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment'. Patton (1990) however argues strongly that a focus group interview is an 'interview'. He firmly articulates that the focus group interview is not a discussion, a problem solving session or a decision making forum; it is an interview. The participants are generally a homogeneous group who have been brought together to reflect on the questions asked by the interviewer. They are able to hear the responses of other members of the group, to challenge or to make additional comments beyond their own original comment. Participants are able to spark off one another, suggesting dimensions and nuances of the original issues that may not have been thought of by any one individual (Patton, 1990; Alston and Bowles, 1998).

The group may if required provide some quality control on the data, members can balance or challenge false or extreme views and be the mechanism to keep the interview focused on the important topics. There is also the potential for participants to attempt to address their own concerns in this forum, diversions can occur, the enthusiasm and assertive nature of individuals may limit the contribution of others, conflict and power struggles may be played out in the forum, confidentiality is not always possible to guarantee and traits of group think could influence the interview (Alston and Bowles, 1998; Berg, 2001).

Nevertheless focus group interviews are widely used in research with credible and valuable results. It is an efficient and economical way of gathering data. It also provides a rich source of qualitative data when managed and conducted carefully (Patton, 1990; Alston and Bowles, 1998). In this study the focus group was made up of three social workers who were delivering care and protection services and, who had been in the role more than five years and less than ten years.

Ethical Procedures

The research project began with the formulations of a research proposal. Applications were made to both Massey University Human Ethics Committee and to the Research and Access Committee (RAC) of CYF. Both Committees examined the research proposal and gave approval for this research. Approval from Massey University's Human Ethics Committee was obtained July 2005 and the approval from the Research and Access Committee (RAC) of CYF for access to CYF social work staff was granted December 2006.

Both the Human Ethics Committee of Massey University and the RAC Committee noted the senior role in CYF held by the researcher. In order to address any concerns regarding the study or the researcher, the participants were advised the Chief Social Worker of CYF had agreed and was available to discuss any matters they wish to bring to her attention. Although the option was available no participants needed to talk with the Chief Social Worker about this research. This process was also noted on the information sheet.

The RAC also required the researcher to declare to interested parties and participants that the study was being undertaken as part of the researcher's personal study and that the private contact details (not the work contact details) were to be used. Massey University's letterhead was used for all matters related to this study. The RAC approval was subject to interviews being conducted at neutral premises and not CYF Offices. However five participants requested that interviews be held at their local office. The researcher made contact with the Manager of the RAC to request a variance to this condition. The variance was approved.

Informed Consent

In this study, informed consent was addressed by way of written consent for the participants in both the in-depth and focus group interviews. The participants were advised of their right to veto or withdraw some or all of the information at any point. Prior to signing the consent form the researcher highlighted the Chief Social Worker's availability should participants wish to discuss any matters that related to this study. The Chief Social Worker supported the study in principle.

Confidentiality

Considerable care was taken to ensure the ethical standards of confidentiality and practical voluntary participation together with a process of informed consent were adhered to in all of the interviews. Agreed ground rules were discussed and established prior to the interview taking place. Throughout the interviews the researcher checked with the participant that they were comfortable continuing to participate. Access to the tapes and transcribed notes were only available to the researcher and the transcribing agency. The transcribing agency returned the tapes and the electronic notes on completion of the transcriptions. The data was managed by utilising a master sheet and each individual participant was allocated a pseudonym and the pseudonyms were used throughout the research. The master sheet is only accessible by the researcher in order to maintain confidentiality and their anonymity. The data will be stored by the researcher and destroyed after five years.

Potential Harm to the Participants

During this research the status and senior role held by the researcher in CYF could be viewed as potentially harmful to the participants. It was agreed with Massey's Human Ethics Committee and CYF's RAC Committee that any conflicts of interest or concerns were brought to the attention of the Chief Social Worker. Participants were made aware of the process. They were advised that should there be any reason or they had concerns regarding the study or the researcher direct access to the Chief Social Worker was available. Participants were advised that no information from the study would be kept on any files, and their responses would not impact on their professional lives in any way. The only exception to this was if unsafe practices

were identified in the course of the interviews. No unsafe practices came to the attention of the researcher.

Potential Harm to the Researcher

The risk of potential harm to the researcher was considered to be minimal. The researcher is a competent and experienced interviewer. The researcher was mindful of the senior role she held within CYF and the possibility that potential participants may provide information which they believed was more palatable to the researcher rather than their own views. This could lead to the study utilising data which is not a true reflection of the participants' views or experiences. Therefore the credibility of study and its findings could be compromised. This risk was discussed with the participants prior to the interviews commencing.

There was potential for criticism to be directed at the researcher in her senior role. Listening to negative comments and the impact which some decisions may have had on social work practice and staff could be upsetting and hurtful for the researcher. Discussing and reflecting these concerns with the researcher's supervisors assisted in dealing with these issues. Being aware and having a strategy in place to address these concerns alleviated some of the researcher's fears. Engaging positively with the participants and declaring that the intent of the study was to contribute to raising the profile of child protection social work moderated their anxiety. Ensuring participants were comfortable and willing to contribute to the study minimised potential harm to the researcher.

Use of the Information

The information gathered in this research was intended primarily to complete this thesis. The information gathered may also be used by employers to increase their understanding of what is valued by social work professionals and in so doing increase their prospects of attracting and retaining experienced staff in the public child welfare agencies. Iwi and Pacific Social Service agencies may also benefit from this information. The findings of this study could be considered as part of a strategy to employ qualified experienced staff in their organisations. Supporting and harnessing a culture within an agency where social work skills are valued and respected may increase the likelihood of these professionals choosing to remain in

the care and protection field. Social work educators could also draw students' attention to the information. It provides an insight into statutory social work which may assist with their decision making whether to apply for a role with CYF as a social worker when they graduate.

Cultural Issues

The researcher was supported throughout the study by a cultural advisor who has an extensive social work background. The researcher met with the advisor to discuss the progress of the study and to be guided on matters of tikanga (process) prior to planning and conducting interviews in order to ensure protocols of engagement were addressed. The researcher was mindful of other agency policy documents on multi-cultural and bi-cultural practice and referred to these documents throughout the process (Department of Social Welfare, Puao-Te Ata-Tu, 1988; Department of Social Welfare, Te Punga, 1994; Department of Social Welfare, Pate Lali, Nafa, 1996; Department of Child Youth and Family, Te Pounamu, 2002).

The Participants

Thirteen social workers agreed to take part in this study. Ten social workers were employees of the Department of CYF and three were former social workers who had retired from active service. The criteria are specified below:

- Three social workers held practice leadership roles in care and protection and their length of experience in the leadership role exceeded three years.
- Three social workers whose length of experience in child protection exceeded ten years.
- Four social workers whose length of experience exceeded five years and less than ten years were focus group participants.
- Three retired social workers whose length of experience in care and protection exceeded ten years.

The researcher made direct contact with an administration staff member who disseminated the information sheet on the proposed study to social workers at eight site offices in the Central and lower North Island. Individuals who had an interest in being part of the study were asked to make direct contact with the researcher. The researcher received 17 responses from staff members. Six social workers were chosen for individual interviews and four social workers for the focus group interview.

The retired social workers were identified by the researcher placing an advertisement in the ANZASW's¹ newsletter 'On Notice Board'. The advertisement targeted retired social workers who had been employed by CYF as child protection social workers. The contact details of the researcher were provided as part of the advertisement. The researcher received seven responses from the advertisement for retired social workers. Length of experience and geographical location were considered when selecting these participants. Three retired social workers were chosen to take part in the study. The social workers who participated in the individual interviews and the focus group were chosen because of where they were geographically located. Choosing those who participated in the individual interviews enabled the researcher to secure a geographical diversity of urban, provincial and rural features in the study. The close geographic location of some of the participants determined the composition of the focus group. The individual interview participants and the focus group are profiled below:

¹ ANZASW Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers

Individual Interview Participants

Pseudonyms were allocated to each participant in order to preserve their anonymity.

Name	Length of Service	Gender	Social Work Qualifications	Age	Ethnicity	Geographical
1. Sally	Over 10 years	F	Degree	45-55	Pakeha	Provincial
2. Gay	Over 10 years	F	Diploma	40-50	Maori	Provincial
3. Terry	Over 10 years	M	Diploma	45-55	Cook Island	Provincial
4. Violet	Practice Leader	F	Diploma	40-50	Maori	Urban
5. Whetu	Practice Leader	F	No Qual	35-45	Pakeha	Urban
6. Tracy	Practice Leader	F	Degree	35-45	Pakeha	Provincial
7. Wallace	Retired	F	No Qual	60-70	Pakeha	Rural
8. Anthea	Retired	F	No Qual	60-70	Pakeha	Provincial
9. Neville	Retired	M	No Qual	60-70	Pakeha	Provincial

Focus Group Participants

Name	Length of Service	Gender	Social Work Qualification	Age	Ethnicity	Geographical
10. FG (a)	More than 5 years and less than 10 years	F	degree	35-45	Pakeha	Provincial
11. FG (b)	More than 5 years and less than 10 years	F	degree	40-50	Pakeha	Provincial
12. FG (c)	More than 5 years and less than 10 years	F	No Qual	40-50	Maori	Provincial
13. FG (d)	More than 5 years and less than 10 years	M	degree	35-45	Pacific	Rural

The participants were located in the Central and Lower North Island region. The concentration of these individuals assisted the travel and meeting arrangements for the participants and the researcher.

Data Collection

Data was collected primarily by audio recording the individual and the focus group interview. The data for one individual interview was collected by taking written notes due to the tape recorder malfunctioning. During the interviews brief notes of key statements were taken and matched against each transcribed interview. Transcribing each interview was completed as soon as practicable after the interview, in order to listen, analyse and reflect on the responses made by the participants. The researcher did not transcribe the tapes. The tapes were transcribed by a transcription service.

The In-Depth Interviews

The retired social workers were interviewed first. One interview took place at a CYF site office and the other two interviews were undertaken at a community facility. The length of these interviews with the retired participants ranged between 70-100 minutes. The interview setting for the current staff of CYF was decided by the participants. Two interviews were held at the CYF local offices, four interviews were held at other locations at the request of the participants. The interviews took approximately 50–80 minutes. A significant characteristic of the in-depth interviews was the repeated interactions between the researcher and the participants. Many of the comments made by participants were confirmed by others in their interviews (Kumar, 2005). The retired social workers took time to reflect and reminisce about their journey in social work and also comment on the status of the social work profession in New Zealand.

An interview guide approach was used as the framework for the individual interviews. The interviews were structured as a set of key questions. The questions explored the attraction to the child protection role, the purpose and vision of child protection work, and the mechanisms which were considered vital to the role. Further enquiry explored the strengths and development opportunities for CYF and how 'success' was celebrated by the agency. The interviewer managed the sequence and the wording of the questions as the interview progressed (Appendix 4). Patton (1990) conveyed that interviews are usually fairly conversational and situational and the benefits of using an interview guide approach does increase the

comprehensiveness of data and makes the data systematic for each respondent. In order for the interviews to be effective there does have to be a two-way flow of communication. The interviews were conversational; the engagement with each participant was responsive and open. The interviewer took responsibility to communicate concisely what information was desired and why it was important. The participants conveyed their stories in a number of ways; using humour, expressing frustration, being angry and passionate. Participants also reflected on current and past social work practice in New Zealand.

It was important in this study for the interviewer to identify herself in this context as a research interviewer. This committed the researcher to portraying a convincing characterisation of this role to the participants (Berg, 2001). Declaring the role of interviewer at the beginning of each in-depth interview and the focus group interview helped to distance the researcher from the persona of her previous senior role in CYF.

The Focus Group Interview

The focus group participants were located in the Central North Island Region. This cohort was made up of social workers whose experience in the child protection role was more than five years and less than ten years. Four participants were chosen for the focus group; one participant was unable to attend on the day of the interview therefore three participants took part in the focus group discussion. The researcher convened the focus group. The group interview was held at a local CYF office. The questions guide used in the focus group was the same used for the individual interviews. The duration of the interview was approximately two hours. The questions provided the framework for the discussion. In order to keep the conversation focused the researcher was required to restate the question a number of occasions. Comments made by individuals within the focus group provided a platform for others to comment, expand, debate and disagree. The group participation was lively and energetic, the discourse was free and frank, and humour had a noticeable presence in the discussion. The researcher took care to ensure each participant was given the opportunity to make comment; laughter was used as a medium to make comments that were uncomplimentary in nature about the agency for example, using the analogy of describing the social workers' role as a worker ants

who were cold, weary and hungry at the end of each working day, the manager' role was depicted as the monitor who audited the work of the ant. The focus group interview was audio-taped and transcribed by a transcription service. The transcription was produced for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data was anchored with an inductive thematic analysis in order to identify the emerging themes (Patton, 1990). The process of a thematic analysis was achieved by a careful close word by word, sentence by sentence analysis. Each interview was systematically scrutinised for information and the emergence of themes and patterns (Kumar, 2005). The themes were assembled into clearly defined categories (Field, 2004) and analysed for any important 'causes, consequences and relationships' (Patton, 1990:422). A matrix was used to compare the data between the two methods of collection and to examine any common themes and to synthesise preliminary findings. Significant comments, reflections and quotes were noted and data was interpreted into meaningful annotations (Field, 2004) about the role of a care and protection social worker. Three key themes emerged: the attraction to the child protection role, the support mechanisms that are important to the role and the strengths and challenges of the role. Each theme was supported by a number of sub themes for example, making a difference for at risk children.

Summary

This chapter has presented the qualitative approach taken in this study. Two processes were used to collect data: the in-depth individual and focus group interview. The interview process was guided by semi-structured questions. Length of experience was used as the primary indicator for participant involvement in this study. The senior role of the researcher was discussed with each of the participants before interviews commenced. The ethical considerations raised by the project were also traversed in this section. The next chapter presents the findings of the in-depth interviews and the themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Section Three: Voices and Findings

Chapter Four The Findings of the Individual Interviews

The focus of this research was to examine and explore the factors which contribute to some social workers making deliberate choices to stay and work in child protection even though the environment in which they operate is challenging, difficult and inherently stressful. This chapter reports the findings from the individual in-depth interviews. Nine child protection social workers were interviewed, three social workers held practice leadership roles in care and protection and their experience in the leadership role exceeded three years; three social workers had experience which exceeded ten years and three retired social workers whose length of experience in care and protection exceeded ten years. The participants were provided with an outline of the research question prior to the interview. The findings have been presented thematically.

Themes

The participants provided comprehensive and insightful data which identified what motivated them to stay in their role. They also shared their disappointments and the frustrations of the role. The information gained from these interviews has been presented in the following themes: the attraction of child protection social work, the support mechanisms for child protection social workers and the strengths and challenges of the child protection social work role. These themes provided a framework in which to examine and evaluate what mattered to these workers and in particular what kept them committed to statutory child protection social work.

The Attraction of Child Protection Social Work

Social workers who are employed by the Department CYF Services in New Zealand investigate, assess and provide services to children who are likely to be or who are being abused or neglected. The role is very powerful. A statutory social worker has the authority to intervene in a family's life; children can be removed from their parents and alternative care arrangements may be organised for a child, custody and guardianship orders may be sought from the court in order for social workers to make day to day decisions on behalf of that child. The participants spoke openly of their commitment and their desire to nurture and assist families in their quest to care

for their children. They acknowledged that a child's family is the primary decision maker for their children. This theme has four sub-themes: the characteristics of the role, making a difference, passion, commitment and the challenge of the role and belief in the whanau and the community.

The Characteristics of the Role

The participants described their role to be demanding and complex. They accepted that care and protection work would always have a degree of difficulty and complexity and that conflict would be present in many of cases they managed. They reported that supporting vulnerable children gave them a high sense of satisfaction. Resilience and tenacity were attributes described by these participants as important traits in this work.

...it is a hard job, it's very rewarding role as well {Gay}.

...You never knew what was going to happen from day to day. You have got to do the hard stuff. You have got to really line people up and say if you don't make these changes {Anthea}.

...You won't survive unless you actually want to be a social worker. It keeps you awake sometimes {Terry}.

Observations which Sally, Whetu and Neville highlighted were that the organisational pressures and expectations were relentless.

...There are so many pressures within the organisation to meet, organisational requests, it bombards you almost daily. It's a never-ending battle {Sally}.

...The organisational demands can overwhelm you if you are not strong and confident in being able to make a judgment on what is critical and what is urgent {Neville}.

The pressures and the demands experienced by these participants were tolerated because they believed that their efforts made a difference to a child's life.

Making a Difference

Without exception every participant who was interviewed for this study identified that the wellbeing of children and child safety was the primary reason they choose to participate in this field of social work. They believed that the work that they undertook as care and protection social workers helped a vulnerable child and their intervention made a difference at that time to a child's life.

...For a child, no matter what environment they are growing up in, to be able to have access to a quality of life that enables them to grow and to flourish within that family, that has to continue. That's the thing that remains constant, that's adding value {Terry}.

...We attempt to keep them [children] safe. The idea that you're going to stop the cycle and you are going to be able to create the change kept you going {Sally}.

...I wanted to make things better for the families but also for the children and many of the kids I worked with. I just saw such a huge waste of potential {Whetu}.

...That I have made a difference to children's' lives, that's what being a statutory social worker is all about. You want to make a difference in their lives {Tracy}.

Participants were passionate about children. They believed these children were the most vulnerable and that as social workers they had something to offer. They were committed to helping and assisting children live in an environment that kept them safe.

Passion, Commitment and the Challenge of the Role

A number of the participants viewed the role as a 'calling' and they described the work they undertook as a vocation. The enthusiasm and dedication to continue in this work had not diminished over time. Working on behalf of vulnerable children was considered most important.

...I believe it's a calling. I don't believe it's a job that's from 8 to 5 {Tracy}.

...It is knowing that this is your calling, it's not a job, it is a cause {Anthea}

...My passion has always been seeing the difference occurring within families and the changes because they've engineered it. Not because of fear. I think for me it's around the support and the caring {Terry}.

... I'm successful when the kids and families that you worked with are in a better state than when you started {Whetu}.

Tracy, Sally and Neville responses were tinged with some caution and disappointment.

...I don't think I ever believed that I was there to save everybody {Tracy}.

...I hoped that these changes are going to be positive, and that it will be better for the children and families that we work with. I've seen second and third generations. That is incredibly sad and you think and question what did I actually do? {Sally}.

...Some young people on my caseload went on to borstal training and then prison. I worked hard and poured my soul into trying to make a difference for them but my efforts were not enough {Neville}.

The participants spoke openly about their desire to help at risk children. This commitment included supporting families within their community.

Belief in the Whanau and the Community

The participants spoke strongly of their belief which placed a high value on being able to engage and mobilise a child's community, their family and wider whanau. Quality engagement with a child's family and their community was viewed as critical. The participants believed the engagement and intervention made a difference to the lives of the children. They also believed that they supported and assisted families to take a key role in the care and decision making for their children.

...My belief is that what they would expect of us is to support and strengthen families and to keep their children safe. We talk about communities, but communities are made up of families {Terry}.

... It's a real commitment to try and make things better for families and the community {Anthea}.

...I believe that a child belongs to their community, their hapu and iwi. It is fundamental {Neville}

Violet and Neville strongly asserted that there was a need to adequately resource organisations that deliver social services within communities. Violet clarified that these organisations complement the work of the statutory agency and help to deliver services to common clients.

...NGOs [non government organisations] need resources; they support statutory social workers. Often the individual social worker is left holding the baby. NGOs need to be supported to provide the services for children and families {Violet}.

...Community groups, particularly Iwi need the resources to do innovative and creative things for kids and families. The trouble is we [CYF] expect them to do it on an oily rag {Neville}.

Participants recognised that the care and protection of children was not the sole domain of CYF and that having successful outcomes did require them to be proactive

in their community. They also asserted that in order to achieve good outcomes having confidence and being supported to do this work was essential.

The Support Mechanisms

The participants acknowledged that there were numerous support mechanisms and policies that had been implemented to assist child protection social workers with their work. The participants acknowledged that assistance and encouragement was visible at different levels of the organisation. Other professional groups employed by CYF such as the lawyers, accountants and information technology specialists contributed their technical expertise to assist social workers to keep children safe. Comments regarding management activities were less favorable. Concerns were expressed by participants about the practice of managers who utilise social work tools to report on the organisational performance such as profession quality assurance framework and the risk estimation tool. The professional quality assurance framework and the risk estimation tool were developed for social workers to reflect and consider their practice and to assess risk and vulnerability factors when investigating a notification of abuse. Both tools are now used to report organisational performance and compliance with accompanying policies of when and where to use the tools. The variability and inconsistent usage of these tools engendered debate. The discussion centered on the usefulness of these mechanisms and the level of skill that was required to utilise the tools and implement the policies. This theme has eight sub-themes: the agency, supervision, self care, relationships, tools, policies and guidelines, training and qualified work force.

The Agency

The participants openly described what it was like working inside the Department of CYF. The participants were generally supportive of the agency as an employer and there was an acceptance that the agency did from time to time value social work skills. Their view of the agency did not concur with the negative public reputation of CYF.

...I think it is an organisation that has been an amazing sort of animal that has changed and evolved as animals do. Some of that has been exciting {Whetu}.

...There have been times when it has been really wonderful. If somebody truly wishes to be a social worker, this is where they will get the best experience, if they go to CYF {Anthea}.

...CYF is a good place to learn. It was a good grounding in skills, knowledge and practice {Tracy}.

Violet expressed disappointment about CYF's response and the lack of commitment to Maori.

...I am frustrated that the Department lacks an understanding of Maori needs. It's not something that the Department recognises anymore. All the recommendations of Puaotē-Ata-Tu and the principles have not been adhered to. There is very little support in terms of Maori in CYF {Violet}.

Participants recognised that CYF had made attempts over time to understand the uniqueness of the social work profession. However they believed that the agency continued to struggle with balancing the business demands of the organisation and the needs of a professional workforce.

Supervision

All of the participants believed that social work supervision was a vital support mechanism that assisted them to carry out their role. They believed that clinical social work supervision provided them with a level of confidence and professional safety in their clinical practice. The positive working relationship between the social worker and their supervisor was considered by these workers to be essential.

...Supervision is really really important. I have had good supervision and having bad supervision makes the role really hard. It is hard already but without a competent supervisor {Tracy}.

...Supervision is absolutely vital. If people don't get supervision I don't think they can really function {Sally}.

...CYF underestimates the value and importance of supervision. Without clinical supervision you have no business delivering social work {Neville}.

A number of participants revealed their concerns that the organisation did not appreciate or understand the value of clinical social work supervision. A prevailing view was that management placed minimal priority on the quality and frequency of supervision. The applicants were concerned about the inconsistent application of CYF's supervision policy.

...Supervision is talked about as being important but it is not always driven as it should be. The quality isn't monitored. The recipients of supervision can only talk in hushed tones about whether what they are receiving meets their needs. You can't underestimate the value of a quality supervisor {Tracy}.

...It is just awful because these are all brand new social workers with so much potential. They often don't know what they don't know because they haven't had good supervision {Sally}.

...Good quality supervision requires development and change. Supervision is not necessarily just casework management, it should encompass your professional development; a huge part of your session should be clinical supervision {Gay}.

Violet declared she was a registered social worker. She advised she was not receiving formal supervision by her manager. She took alternative action in order to address the deficit.

...I am a registered social worker. I actually don't have supervision {Violet}.

Part of the supervisory role is to be interested in how a social worker is managing their work. The participants believed that supervisors should also help them to manage and take responsibility for self care.

Self care

Planning and dedicating some time to be able to rest and engage in recreational activities outside of their employment setting was necessary according to these participants. Finding a balance in their lives and recognising the importance of proactively managing themselves was discussed openly. Quality time away from the work place, taking their annual leave frequently and undertaking different roles within the agency were offered as suggestions which may assist in retaining some social workers in child protection work.

...Being able to take trips overseas. I've got much more of a balance now than I did ten years ago or even four years ago. It is about having a balance {Sally}.

...I've survived. I've had lots of different roles. I don't think somebody could stay in the one role for 30 years. I just don't. Time out and regular holidays {Terry}.

... Always take the break. Leave it at the door at 5 o'clock. Keep yourself safe {Tracy}.

Wallace described the action taken to address issues of self care.

...You can't go out on the town. I never go out to hotels or anything. It's not worth it. Not in a small town. Just because people know who you are, what you do and they want to talk to you. I choose to stay closer to home.

It was important to the participants to ensure they had strategies to take care of themselves. Maintaining and nurturing relationships was considered to be one strategy that complemented their efforts.

Relationships

Stable and supportive relationships according to the participants were seen to be a critical factor in care and protection work. The range and types of relationships were broad and these workers engaged at a number of levels with others such as judges, community workers, kuia and church ministers. Collegial support from other professionals was considered vital. The participants categorised their relationships as professional key stakeholder relationships, internal CYF relationships and personal and family relationships.

Productive professional relationships with community groups and agencies such as the Police and Education and Women's Refuge were cited as supportive mechanisms to help achieve positive outcomes for their clients.

...You have to get support from other people. Other professionals that I've worked with were very supportive and helpful {Anthea}.

...The same with the Police, I've caught up with them in social settings and we just laugh about things; it's a sort of relief {Gay}.

...The networks that I have in the community and the positive feedback that I received from Courts, as well as the schools gives me confidence {Terry}.

These participants believed it was important to nurture and maintain relationships with external stakeholders. They also valued and maintained strong relationships within the agency of CYF. Working supportively and successfully navigating between the different levels and building relationships with individuals and teams within CYF was considered important to the participants. A significant support system for these workers was the camaraderie offered by their colleagues. Having their supervisors and their team members offer professional guidance gave them a level of confidence. They also believed it was important to have faith in the leadership of the organisation.

...My colleagues, they've been there and being able to just talk things through. It is just the support within the office, across the board and from what you get from each other. It is good to just look at and compare notes {Gay}.

...Strong collegial support and a sounding board within the agency does help to reduce my stress and worry. When I talk to my colleagues about my fears, the load seems lighter somehow {Neville}.

...Look to your colleagues for support and how you can be of support to them. Never be afraid to ask questions about what you don't understand {Tracy}.

Collegial support presents itself in different forms. The participants valued both the professional and personal support they received from their colleagues particularly their own teams. The team structure was considered a valuable resource and a body of knowledge that could be easily accessed.

...I've been part of a small team. We are quite close and we've been able to thrash things out and debrief {Wallace}.

..It took a lot of teamwork to try and achieve what we wanted to achieve within the limitation. It was not about money it was actually about engagement {Whetu}.

The participants commented that professional leadership was demonstrated at all different levels of the organisation. It was important to the participants that professional leadership was visible and active. The participants also asserted that a supportive and understanding family and personal networks helped sustain them during the hard times.

The participants recognised and valued the support they received from their family, their friends and acquaintances. They appreciated the strength and motivation these individuals provided, in particular their unwavering support to continue in this work.

Family and friends were depicted as safe havens where successes and concerns could be discussed openly.

...My family keeps me going. I've got a very small group of friends, probably one in particular that I spend a lot of time with {Sally}.

...My family, my husband. They acknowledge the difficulties of the work and he knows when I'm stressed {Gay}.

Being able to talk about their fears and successes helped build their resilience, confidence and morale. Having a strong supportive group of individuals to lean on from time to time was a common theme. Strengthening and broadening their skills and knowledge in social work as well as being a competent user of the tools contributed to building their confidence to make sound judgments and decisions.

Tools

The participants cited a number of tools or system support mechanisms that CYF had implemented such as the risk estimation system (RES), critical stress incident management (CISM), professional quality assurance (PQA) and children youth residential and adoption information system (CYRAS). These tools were made available by the agency for care and protection social workers to use in their work. The value and usage of these mechanisms according to the participants was variable.

... The risk estimation tool (RES), when they go out to do an investigation, they will be able to do a good thorough investigation. We are able to make good decisions for children and families {Sally}.

...I'm passionate about debriefing for CSIM. I think that has been something really great that the Department has brought in. I've seen some wonderful results. The Department had allowed us to go in and do it. It is the fact that a debriefing was offered. Social workers think the Department does care about me {Gay}.

The tool which attracted the most comment from participants was the case management system. The national electronic programme is called CYRAS. CYRAS is the acronym given to the case management recording system used by CYF. This programme records casework information and CYF's performance results which in turn is reported to government. CYRAS also has the capability to link the case management decisions, funding requests and approval to expend money.

...CYRAS has changed the face of social work in this country. It can drive the way you practice {Tracy}.

...I quite like CYRAS, it actually has become quite a good tool. I do use it a lot. I think CYRAS is a useful tool {Violet}.

...I think clearly most of us would agree that CYRAS has had an absolutely major major impact on the organisation. I think we should be very proud of many aspects of CYRAS and not the least which is our ability to share our information. We do need to look at making it less time consuming for social workers to use {Whetu}.

All of the participants confirmed they used CYRAS daily. They viewed CYRAS as their primary recording tool. They also believed that CYF had an expectation that social workers were proficient in using the other electronic tools such as email, intranet, and the professional quality assurance programme. The time spent recording data on these systems was reported to be significant.

...Social workers spend too much time at the computer and not enough time with clients. It takes a while to write case notes, record all phone calls and all the other bits in-between. It takes away time from important stuff like visiting your children in care {Tracy}.

...I've found real difficulty with the emphasis on the computer {Whetu}.

...The problem is that there are too many systems. At the moment there is CYRAS, COGNOS then I use TMS, STS and all have got money attached to it {Violet}.

Wallace noted that most of the resource material was now available on line. CYF use the intranet as the primary mechanism for communication within the organisation. Operational policies are also on line. Finding the information on the system does require a degree of skill and patience.

Policies and Guidelines

The participants commented that there are policies which social workers are required to follow and that these provide them and their supervisors with guidance and direction. The inconsistent application and adherence to these policies is a source of frustration. Locating and accessing policies caused significant stress to a number of the participants.

...I think what is good about policies is that it provides a degree of safety for workers. It provided safety for me. It provided the opportunity to take responsibility and to be accountable. It enabled me and then every other worker to know what it is that they are required to do and need to do {Terry}.

...I always felt that if we followed the policies there was a huge amount of protection for a supervisor and a statutory social worker {Sally}.

...Well thought out policies which have a practice focus protects workers. Policies which have come about because of one incident or with a political agenda do not service children or me as the social worker {Neville}.

A constant theme during this discourse was the need to have a hard copy in the form of a desk file available to each social worker. The participants stressed the need for the desk file to be updated regularly.

...I think social workers have found it more difficult [locating the policies] when it's on the system {Sally}.

...I had a terrible time finding a policy. In the end it came out in a memo. I did eventually find it, but the social worker had no idea {Sally}.

...The fact is that the policy documents are totally out of date and inaccessible and, not integrated into people's learning {Whetu}.

Participants were aware that the approval of operational policies is a key responsibility of the senior leadership group of CYF. The organisation has an expectation that social workers will adhere to these policies. Comments by the participants identified that the application of these policies in practice was not always consistent.

...There is a policy, it is about children and what the plan is, what is fought about at site level is the extra work and the cost. In my experience dealing with case transfers, the policy is clear; putting the policy into practice is very different {Tracy}.

...The pressures of knowing what is required and trying to align these policies when working with families within restricted time-frames is difficult. Having to meet the government requirements too – that is hard {Gay}.

The participants felt the organisation made many demands. The agency expected them to adhere and be aware of all subsequent changes to policy. They reported that this was extremely difficult and these expectations were not always achieved. The sheer volume of policies is a barrier for social workers. Integrating all the operational policies and the practice conditions into their day to day activities becomes unmanageable. Finding time to undertake training, becoming competent in using the technology and learning how to navigate the systems so the documentation can be accessed would be a huge support to them in their role.

Training

Training according to the participants was vital. They appreciated and valued the quality and the frequency of the training being offered by CYF. Being exposed to

new research and evidence based practice supported and assisted them to analyse and consider complex cases.

...Training is really important. In the first two years I had a huge amount of training. It gave me the opportunity to consolidate the theory I had learned, it allowed me to see how it was merged with practice, and it was practical. I knew CYF was a good place to learn. It provided a good grounding and expanded my skills and knowledge. I just wanted to learn everything I could {Tracy}.

... Looking back, the training the Department gave me was world class. We were very lucky {Neville}.

Child protection work needs experienced qualified well trained social workers. The environment in New Zealand demands social workers be accountable for their practice and demonstrate they are competent to practice and take responsibility for their decision making. CYF is working towards achieving a fully qualified registered social work workforce.

Qualified Work Force

A number of participants cited their social work qualification as a support mechanism. It helped to build their resilience and confidence and it was a factor which contributed to them choosing to remain in the care and protection field. Understanding social work theories, accessing research and evaluation and expanding their knowledge through professional development also contributed to their longevity in child protection.

...I am a qualified social worker. That gives me confidence {Terry}.

...I did the degree in Social Work at Massey. I feel fortunate to have had that opportunity. I also saw it as important in the work; to have that qualification {Sally}.

...It placed me in a good position for overseas. I had had a good grounding in social work knowledge. It enabled me to progress in terms of the role {Tracy}.

Violet asserted that a qualification without practice experience was limiting and an issue that required addressing.

...New social workers come in with all of the qualifications and not a lot of practical skills. Supervisors are leaving the service stressed and this opens up roles for these people who have not been in the service for very long to come up and straight away you have an issue {Violet}.

Training is one of the key support functions identified as necessary in order for a competent social worker to operate. A number of participants identified that support mechanisms extended beyond clinical social work. The visible support of the agency in the public arena and the proactive investment in social work development for front line workers was considered important by these participants. Supervision is the life blood of the social work profession and should be strengthened. Monitoring the wellbeing of staff and being proactive in addressing individual and corporate responsibility for self care could improve the quality and the commitment of these social workers to child protection work. Participants' recognised assistance was needed from key stakeholders such as the Ministries of Health and Education and support from their colleagues, their team and personal networks was vital. The integration of technological support mechanisms, the policies which support the work and the training investment required for staff to become competent in using the tools requires careful thought. These demands impact on social work time and the quantity and quality of work that can be achieved. Nevertheless these participants believed that the investments being made by CYF in the main supports them in their quest to make a difference for children.

The Strengths and Challenges of the Role

The participants reported positively on numerous strategies and initiatives. They spoke openly about the organisation's strengths and acknowledged the amount of work undertaken to achieve key milestones such as increasing the number of

available residential beds and securing resources for children with high and complex needs. There was also commentary on the challenges that face CYF and the impact of these concerns on staff. A number of the challenges mirror the international social work sector such as the negative public image of social work and the increasing workloads. This theme has eight sections: public image, leadership; management vs. social work, National Office and the front line, employment of social workers, workload management, resources, services to Maori and celebrating success.

Public Image

The discourse about CYF's public image reflected almost a resignation by some participants that any child protection agency would find it difficult to have the public's confidence and a reputation of trust. They believed it was not reasonable or achievable to please all parties in every situation. Listening to the criticism, bearing the brunt of blame and being publicly shamed was difficult and hard for them to constantly sustain.

...We come under huge criticism when we don't but of course we come under huge criticism when we do {Gay}.

...I think we will continue to be an organisation that the New Zealand public has some doubts about. We are just known as a big heavy handed government agency {Whetu}.

...There is a tendency for them [public] to blame. As soon as something goes wrong then it is always CYF's fault whether the Department knew anything about the matter or not. It must have been CYF'S fault because nothing was done about it {Anthea}.

Terry and Neville reported that at a local level, there were times when CYF received positive commentary and care and protection social workers were recognised for their work.

...There are sections of our community that uphold the work of our staff. People who say 'we know your staff are doing a good job'. I think the public have a right to have expectations of us {Terry}.

...My staff, all of my staff do an extra-ordinary job. At a local level they received accolades from local council, groups and families. At a national level, no-body cared much {Neville}.

The behaviour of the public and some politicians is to assign blame quickly to the child welfare agency when a child is hurt or dies. A number of comments from the participants suggested that CYF is considered culpable for society's failure to care for its children. Improving public confidence was considered to be a strategy to retain social workers.

Leadership: Management vs. Social Work

The public expects the leaders of CYF to be confident, to demonstrate their business acumen and social work competency. Managing these expectations according to the participants does create a tension between the business and social work disciplines. Balancing these demands is not simple. When the leadership of the organisation is perceived to value managerialism and business ethics more than social work this has a negative impact on workers motivation to remain in the child protection field.

...We have a business management approach and we have time frames to meet. I don't necessarily have difficulties around those principles. What I do have [difficulty with] is sometimes some of these provisions don't quite accommodate what is needed. It's having our practice shaped or supported by our caring community not managerial imperatives {Terry}.

...I have seen many leaders come and go. The best were always those who understood and appreciated social work and its value base. The most destructive leader viewed social workers as nothing more than kaftan wearing hippies who couldn't get real jobs and who didn't know how to fill in the KPI's {Neville}.

...All of the managers I thought were excellent leaders came from a social work background {Tracy}.

Violet considered that the most important skill for a leader to have was management skills.

...I think you should have more management skills than anything else because you shouldn't be in a position like that if you don't know how to manage. You should also have a knowledge base of social work. You are not there to make friends {Violet}.

The leadership and the direction of the organisation are driven from the National Office which is located Wellington. The respective and unique roles of the National Office and the front line social worker is not always appreciated or understood by each other or the different areas within CYF or by external stakeholders.

National Office and the Front Line

The National Office of CYF was considered by the participants to be both strength and an impediment to their role. The experience of engaging with the National Office staff was mixed. The participants believed that the sharing of information and advising social workers on the functions of each area of National Office would assist those who worked on the front line to understand and perhaps value more the work undertaken in Wellington.

... It was helpful to be able to access advice and support from National Office. There are lots of advisory roles, people who have specialist knowledge {Tracy}.

...There are many wise heads in National Office. The frontline has to learn how to use them. I always found when I rang for help that there were a number of advisors willing to lend a hand {Neville}.

Whetu, Tracy and Violet spoke about the demands and the unwelcome intrusion by the National Office in their work. A number of comments were negative. A

common theme in the discussion was what emanated from National Office was not always useful and there were constant changes to policy and process. There was also a degree of resentment about the level of resources invested in National Office and how those resources were utilised

...Things come out of National Office with variations on things all of the time. It is not helpful for social workers. As social workers when you don't understand why something is being done or see the value you tend to just ignore it if you can {Tracy}.

...The bureaucracy inhibits you. There are so many fingers in the pie and so many of those fingers do not have the knowledge of the actual work that you do. It stops things happening and there is a delay in getting those things back and to the end user, which is usually the social worker, the family, the whanau {Voilet}.

Sally summarised the tensions with stark accuracy. She articulated that so often the social workers who are at the front line have never met or had contact with staff at the National Office. Neither do they understand National Office's contribution to vulnerable children.

...All workers see is that National Office ask us for more and more information, to tick more and more boxes. However they do important work to help us, that isn't often understood {Sally}.

It could be argued that the different functions with CYF all contribute towards achieving a safe environment for New Zealand children and supporting those families who need assistance. Improving the understanding of the contributions and investments of each group may help lessen the gap between National Office and the professional social staff. It would be advantageous for those who work at National Office to continuously engage with social workers, supervisors and practice leaders in order to plan and operationalise strategies to attract, recruit and retain qualified social workers.

Employment of Social Workers

Attracting competent and confident social workers was cited as both an opportunity and strength for statutory social work. The participants commented on the importance of being a good 'fit' for the role. These social workers also expected managers to be able to address performance issues quickly. When managers did not address performance some participants considered this a disincentive to remain in the role.

...What I wanted to achieve was to have staff who actually were excellent in what they were doing {Whetu}.

...Attracting social workers who were able to excel in child protection was the easy part of my role. Ensuring they continued to be supported, well trained and supervised was not so straightforward. I am not able to say with any degree of confidence that I was 100% successful at my job all of the time {Neville}.

Wallace expressed frustration at expending vast amounts of time and energy on dealing with performance matters.

...To be frank we have employed some people who shouldn't have been there. We should be able to move people on {Wallace}.

The conversation covered a broad range of employment matters. Recruitment and performance management was viewed as part of a process in securing competent staff. Retaining and providing staff with an environment which allows them to strive for excellence was considered compulsory. Having a workload that was manageable and having the time to be able to build a relationship with a client that was meaningful and effective was also considered essential.

Workload Management

Securing a commitment and a policy which determined what was a reasonable caseload for social workers was an issue that participants believed would assist in keeping social workers longer in the child protection field. Wallace believed that the

development of a case management tool was essential. The focus on unallocated notifications by the politicians and the media over stretched the capability of the agency and imposed the weight of those cases onto the social workers at the front line.

... A tool to manage caseloads would be my priority {Wallace}.

...I think caseloads have come down. It's the complexity of the cases that you need to take into account. I would say probably say 18 to 20. You have to take into account some of these families that can just devour days and days at a time {Anthea}.

...Caseloads were unmanageable sometimes. The pressure to take more and more cases was overpowering. We could not do justice to all of the cases {Neville}.

It was important to these participants that the organisation recognised that being allocated too many cases compromised the quality of the work and the engagement with clients. They also believed it was necessary that the agency accepted that a complex case consumes enormous amounts time, resources and energy. Balancing all of the demands and ensuring there are adequate resources to undertake this work remained an organisational quandary.

Resources

The participants spoke about the importance of being able to access resources to assist children and young people. Several participants commented about the fear and courage it took to ask their managers for resources. Care placements for troubled youth and young people were viewed as a valuable resource. Staff and managers who have the delegation to expend fiscal resources may wish to give consideration to why some social workers are frightened to ask for money to support investigations or plans given that is CYF's core business.

...Social work is a really unsupported role. It doesn't get the financial support it needs to do the job well. Even with the resources we have; it isn't enough to do the job well {Tracy}.

...CYF received a significant amount of new money as a result of the baseline review. There was money for court orders and FGC outcomes and convening conferences. Every year now the budgets out to sites are just more and more squeezed {Neville}.

...Interestingly I won't say money; budgets were always an issue. It's not just about money it's actually about engagement {Whetu}.

The lack of adequate resources to support clients impacted significantly on the credibility and integrity of social work professionals. Social workers understood that the fiscal resource was finite and they acknowledged the tension between the amount of money available and their desire to support clients. The balancing of these two factors required consideration at the corporate level. It was not reasonable to expect social workers to solve these concerns on their own.

Gay found it difficult to accept that a social worker was left to struggle to find a suitable placement for a young person who required close monitoring and supervision. She asserted that behaviourally difficult young people who were remanded in the custody of the Chief Executive were a corporate responsibility and not the sole responsibility of the social worker.

...When we need a placement and our backs are against the wall, it is just horrendous to try and get him in anywhere. We made all these applications for every reason we could think of, the paperwork is huge and trying to get a response was even more difficult. When it is 4 o'clock on Friday and you've got nowhere to put a kid, it makes you feel sick {Gay}.

Resources for FGC plans, orders and placements for children and young people are valuable support tools for a social worker. Maori children and their families represent approximately 65% of CYF clients. The high visibility of Maori in the care

and protection system continues to be a challenge both to the agency and to social work practice. Significant investment and targeting of programmes specifically for Maori children and young people have been initiated and implemented over the past 18 years. Reducing the numbers of Maori children who receive services or who are in care has not been achieved. The difference that was envisaged when Puao-Te-Ata-Tu was released in 1986 is yet to be realised.

Services to Maori

Violet, Terry and Wallace lamented the erosion of strategies that came about from the recommendations of Puao-Te-Ata-Tu. These social workers felt that CYF had not been successful at fully implementing all of these recommendations. There was also a sense that the frequent of changes in the leadership of CYF had led to a diminishing commitment to Maori. Developing and supporting Maori staff was noted as an opportunity for CYF to engage more effectively with Maori families and with Iwi.

..I am frustrated that the Department has a lack of understanding of Maori needs. It is not something the Department recognises anymore. All the recommendations of Puao-Te-Ata-Tu and the principles have not been adhered to and Maori providers have their own perceptions of what the Department looks like and it's not good {Violet}.

...I go back to the recommendations and principles of Puao-Te-Ata-Tu. There is a need to focus more on improving the capability and capacity of the community providers and to look at reducing CYF's scope of work {Wallace}.

The desire of the participants to keep the recommendations of Puao-Te-Ata-Tu alive and use those outcomes to drive the direction of care and protection services for Maori children and their families within the agency remains strong. This was evident in the interviews with the Maori and Pacific Nations social workers. Their quest to have Maori served by their own iwi and hapu aligns with the intent in the CYPF Act (1989) and also in agency documents: Puao-Te-Ata-Tu, Te Punga and Te

Pounamu. Targeting and encouraging Maori staff to strive for roles that have influence and authority would be beneficial to the agency and for Maori. Taking time to celebrate the small as well as the larger achievements will also help to strengthen these relationships and build the confidence to try innovative and creative new ventures.

Celebrating Success

The chorus from these participants was that being recognised and acknowledged for their work and achievements made a significant difference to their sense of self worth. It also provided them with a sense of doing well. They asserted that celebrating success was crucial to sustaining and maintaining their motivation and their energy for the role. A number of the participants expressed sadness that they had not experienced any celebration to acknowledge their successes.

...For statutory social worker to know that management does appreciate them and that they [managers] do want to look after them, that counts {Tracy}.

...If success was celebrated more, staff [social workers] would stick it at it more. The difference when you receive some recognition is incredible. It makes such a difference. It can make your crappy day not so bad after all. It doesn't have to cost money, we don't expect a \$5000.00 bonus, it just has to be 'you've done a good job' {Terry}.

Being acknowledged and recognised for effort and results does help to build confidence and resilience. It also provides the individual with a sense of success. Strengthening a social worker's belief that what s/he is doing does make a difference can reinforce their drive and determination for the work. Children and families were consistent themes throughout all of the interviews. Working in the care and protection area according to these social workers did provide them with a level of job satisfaction. There were also challenges and frustrations experienced in their day to day work. However it was the contribution to the lives of New Zealand children and their families that kept them in the role particularly when things were stressful.

...I have been working for CYF and the people of New Zealand for a long time; I don't have any regrets. To say that I have enjoyed every moment would be a lie, there are varying experiences, but by and large I have wonderful memories {Whetu}.

...I am doing this job because I enjoy the work. On a Friday at 5:00pm if I can go home and think I have done everything I could, that is success. {Tracy}.

...The learning I've gained and passed on and the times when I've been given a hand up by others, those are the memories. Every single family, I've come away with a really good feeling of warmth. One youth, who was in a residence when I was there was on a building site and saw me walking past; he said hello. He told me his name and that he is a chippie and that he had a family. I still remember those little messages. I think, I can plan now for my exit with very good memories {Terry}.

Summary

The individual interviews provided strong themes of what can assist care and protection social workers to choose to remain in this specialist area of social work. The role can provide social workers with a high level of job satisfaction. Keeping children safe and contributing to their wellbeing is important to these staff. Making a difference in the life of a child is principally why they do it. The work is very challenging and tough and not every social worker is suited to working in the child protection environment. The workload and the organisational pressures are reported to be relentless and these workers live with the knowledge that regardless of their efforts a number of New Zealand adults will continue to abuse and neglect their children and that every year one of them will be the social worker of a child or young person who dies or is badly hurt. The participants' passion and commitment to this vulnerable sector of our society outweighed the myriad of less desirable factors that accompany the role.

The participants acknowledged that there were key support mechanisms that assisted them to undertake their role. The application of these mechanisms was irregular and

inconsistent. The provision of clinical social work supervision was viewed as critical. The other key support mechanism that was considered important was to have one current operational policy manual. This manual needs to be available to every social worker for their reference. Constructive relationships and strong leadership were considered to be high value support mechanisms. Local leadership was deemed to be the most important. CYF were considered in the main to be the organisation where you could gain the experience, skill and knowledge if you wished to truly be a social worker.

The participants recognised that the role had strengths and challenges. The process of assessing being fit for the role and addressing performance matters required strengthening. The lack of understanding of the functions of National Office and operational frontline workers role remained a chasm. The growing investment in the National Office ignited a high level of tension and irritation for these social workers.

Being acknowledged and having their successes celebrated in a meaningful way by their leaders was important to these workers. The desire to have social work expertise valued and acknowledged was significant. There was a sense that managerialism was the more respected discipline. The lack of success in implementing all of the recommendations of Puaotea and the insidious move away from recognising Maori as unique has resulted in a deep sense of sadness and a loss of trust for these workers in the organisation.

Notwithstanding the concerns and issues, recognising the turbulent environment and the overwhelming demand for their services, a number of care and protection social workers do remain in this role. What continues to motivate and sustain these social workers is their passion, commitment and being able to achieve great outcomes for New Zealand's most vulnerable children and their families.

Chapter Five The Finding of the Focus Group Interview

The second method applied in this research study was a focus group. The focus group was conducted with (three) statutory child protection social workers whose experience range is between five and ten years. These social workers provided qualitative information on the factors which motivated them to make deliberate choices to remain working in statutory social work. They also provided comment on the strengths and challenges of the role. The discussion was lively and spontaneous. The researcher's senior role in the agency did not appear to inhibit their discussions. They raised both positive and negative issues about the agency and the work environment. The findings from the focus group include the following themes: the attraction to the child protection role, the support mechanisms that are important to the role and the strengths and challenges of the role.

The Attraction to the Child Protection Role

These social workers were resolute and steadfast when they discussed why they work in the child protection field. The discourse was animated. At times during the discussion a number of issues triggered the passion and determination of these participants. The challenging nature of the work, the broad range of duties they undertake, the unpredictability of the work and, their commitment to providing a safety net for vulnerable children is why they choose to do this work. The desire to work with others such as other government departments and community groups in order to secure good outcomes for children was strong. The comprehensive insights and information about the attraction and motivation to do this role have been organised in this section into the following sub-themes: keeping children safe, making a difference in the lives of children and their families and the passion and challenge of child protection work.

Keeping Children Safe

Statutory social workers have the responsibility to take action when they believe a child is being abused, neglected or are in situations where they are likely to be harmed. In the event that a statutory child protection response is required in order to

achieve child safety it was important to these participants that an assessment of family circumstances is also undertaken to determine whether support services could assist the family with their care responsibilities. Working with families to assist them care for their children and to address the cycle of generational abuse of children is a long term goal of these participants.

...Child safety is why I come to work and I think we've got a great agency that allows us to do that.

...Keeping children safe. I see myself as a statutory social worker keeping our children safe.

...We attempt to keep them [children] safe. The idea that you are going to stop the cycle and you are going to be able to create the change and that you are going to put a stop [to the abuse] is why I do it. Children need support.

Two members of the group verbalised concerns that despite the collective effort by all those who work in the social sector, that saving every child was not a realistic expectation.

...There is a lot of energy, we have a lot to give but we have to be realistic about what can be achieved. We can't save all the children.

...In our work we see what some adults do to children. It isn't very nice. New Zealand children will continue to be harmed.

Children who are defenseless and exposed to danger evoke an instinct and a desire in most adults to protect and shield them from harm. The work day can be heartbreaking and heartwarming for social workers who investigate and intervene where there is a concern for a child's safety. They are instrumental in taking action that prevents further harm being inflicted on a child and working with families to support their children. Working to protect a child from harm and making a difference in their lives was important to these participants.

Making a Difference in the Lives of Children and their Families

Approximately 5077 New Zealand children were in the custody or guardianship of the Chief Executive of CYF on the night of 30 June 2006 (Department of CYF, 2006). Child protection social workers collaborate, consult and discuss plans with a child's family, extended family as well as other agencies in order to achieve positive outcomes for children. Working with families and providing support and assistance in the early stages of the engagement is what these participants attempt to achieve.

...I have come to believe that I can make a difference working in the Department.

...I am a great believer in getting in there, I see all those young children and if you get in there and do some good social work now it will prevent it [a renotification] when the children are 13, and 14.

A cautionary comment was made that highlighted the need for social workers to be sure that their actions assisted children and to ensure no further harm was experienced by them.

...I think that we have got to be really sure we can offer a child a better environment before we take action.

The acknowledgement by one participant that further damage can be done to a child while receiving statutory social work services was sobering.

...I don't like the damage that we do to kids that come into care. I had a conversation with a woman today who was having her children removed and she spoke about the damage that can happen when a child comes into care. I have to agree with her because we do, do damage.

Making a difference, doing no further harm to children, balancing the tension between child rescue and family preservation and having to make decisions on limited information in a compressed period of time are the pressures that a statutory social worker is required to manage. When circumstances are unclear and the adults

are emotionally charged, ambiguity and uncertainty can leave workers feeling afraid. Making social work judgments in these situations is never easy and requires courage and determination to do what is or looks to be right for that child at that time.

The Passion and Challenge of Child Protection Work

Comments on having a passion for this work and the challenging aspects of the role were made throughout the discussion. Helping and supporting children, witnessing achievements of families and celebrating successes along the way are factors that keep social workers' committed to child protection. Accomplishing good outcomes for children provides the buoy which helps them sustain the negative environmental conditions of the role.

...I'm passionate about the well being of the children, working for the betterment of children. The challenge of the work and passion for the children is why I do it.

...When you are in there and committed and you have passion that is when you know this is your calling. You are never going to get paid well and no-one will respect you for what you do but if you have the drive and passion that will sustain you. You won't survive unless you really want to be a social worker.

The determination and passion of these social workers assists in retaining them in this role. Protecting children and keeping them safe means a great deal to these workers. This work can be viewed as altruistic however what does need to be considered is that there are many risks associated with child protection work such as a child being hurt or tragically dying whilst on a social worker's caseload. In order to be able to operate efficiently and effectively social workers require a number of support mechanisms to be in place. These mechanisms must be accessible and operating at all times.

The Support Mechanisms that are Important to the Role

The discussion on the support mechanisms for social workers included a mix of positive comments and what needed to be considered to improve what currently exists. The frustration that is generated when processes are not helpful was made explicit by the participants. The availability and quality of the support functions such as supervision was emphasised as being essential to the role. The participants suggested that these mechanisms should be available for social workers to utilise in their day to day activities. This section presents four sub-themes: supervision, self care, relationships and policies and programmes.

Supervision

Quality supervision was described as a valued process for workers. There was agreement that a competent experienced social work supervisor is highly revered and prized in CYF. These participants felt supervision provided them with a degree of protection and the confidence to engage with clients who present with difficult circumstances. Balancing the reporting and administrative requirements of the agency alongside social work practice concerns was reported as not always achievable for a supervisor.

...Good supervision and having a good relationship with your supervisor. Whether that is cultivated or you just click with somebody, it is important.

...Mine is a competent supervisor and a competent manager really. It starts at the top. Having both is ideal.

...You get to keep your staff if a supervisor can support and look after their team rather than doing all the other stuff. It's a silly war around KPI's and supervisors get bogged down.

Although quality supervision was considered essential to ensuring good social work practice the discussion drew attention to that fact that some social workers did not receive professional support from their supervisors. A further concern identified was that supervisors themselves were managing cases in order to take the pressure off front line staff. Administrative tasks and performance reporting received more of the

supervisor's attention than the clinical social work aspects of their role. Not all supervisors were viewed as competent or confident in their role.

...I think of all the time I have been in the Department, especially in the last three or four years, my supervisor always carried a caseload. That is bad.

...There was a time where I didn't feel supported by my supervisor and I lost a lot of confidence. It was a bit of a constant really. You have to be strong and speak out for yourself.

...We are told in supervision that 'you are doing a good job'. You then get management saying 'you have got to pull your socks up and you have to be at 100%'. It is the KPI's, there seems to be incongruence and sometimes it is not transparent.

Two participants advised that they had not received supervision for some time. Alternative action was taken to fill this void. They put in place a forum which enabled cases and concerns to be discussed.

...I usually get journal supervision. It is not formal. I go to an ex-colleague or a previous supervisor. I will use them on a monthly basis to catch up, I do it that way.

...Yes, I go and see colleagues as well.

Delivering quality social work can not be achieved without quality supervision. Supervision is the mechanism that should provide the agency with the confidence that the professional requirements of social workers are being addressed. The data from this study suggests that some social workers are not receiving quality supervision and that the scheduling of supervision sessions are spasmodic and not in line with the agency's supervision policy.

The CYF's supervision policy appears to be difficult to administer. Supervision is one of the processes that alert supervisors to the possibility a social worker maybe

suffering from stress or is struggling with an aspect of casework. In my experience it is reasonable to have an expectation that a supervisor will engage with each of their social workers at least once a day to check if they require assistance. Having confidence that social workers are psychologically and physically able to perform their duties and that they are managing their casework in line with the agency's policies and procedures are essential elements of a supervisor's role.

Self care

It was considered that in order to help others, a social worker needed to take personal responsibility for their own wellbeing. The participants recognised that the agency could not always do this and therefore relying solely on CYF to do this on their behalf was not reasonable.

...Know yourself and your own ability to cope. The ability to see that you could be at risk of stress and to work out that something is not right. You need to get the help you need.

...Keep yourself safe, leave it at the door at 5.0'clock and take your breaks. Always take your breaks. It is all about making sure that you stay well.

These participants were unequivocal about the need to be disciplined on taking responsibility for their own wellbeing. The value of taking frequent and planned breaks was considered essential to keeping well. Nurturing strong relationships both within and outside of the agency was also a strategy that was used by the participants to keep them physically and emotionally well. Relationships with key individuals were viewed as a supportive network. This set of connections contributed to progressing casework milestones.

Relationships

Relationships were considered to be an important factor which assisted social workers to achieve positive outcomes for children. Strong relationships were support mechanisms for these workers. Nurturing and maintaining relationships was viewed as a crucial element which often helped to progress services and support for children. Being able to broker services or engage on matters on behalf of children with key

people assisted in the formulation of effective plans and it also increased the prospect of these plans being completed by the child and their family. Being able to discharge court orders appropriately does give social workers a sense of achievement and job satisfaction. The support of colleagues, family and friends was particularly important to them.

...Your colleagues stand out really and you learn from them. I go and see them when I have a difficult case. You have too; otherwise you can not survive here.

...I have social work friends out in the community. And the kids, they keep you in the job because you realise what normality is and why you do the job.

...Yes my own children. Having a supportive family has been the key.

A comment was made that identified that these workers felt quite vulnerable at times. It was important to them to be able to trust fellow professionals and know that the agency's relationship with them was predicated on trust and a commitment to the mission of safe children.

...The Department is the only place we can trust. I think I should be able to at least trust that I'm not going to get dumped on. I don't expect it.

The support of a social worker's family, particularly their children was prized by these participants. It was important that there was a haven for them to return to at the end of each working day. This helped these participants to remember and appreciate that life extended beyond their work. Having confidence and trust in the agency required a belief that they could rely on CYF to provide what was needed to enable this work to be done well. Participants identified having access to clear, concise and clinically sound operational policies was important for workers. These tools provided guidance, agency expectations and protocols which helped social workers progress plans for children on their caseloads.

Policies and Programmes

There was agreement that the policies which were formulated in National Office caused frustration rather than assistance at the front line. The participants became agitated when they discussed the effects of constant changes to policies. They also believed there was a lack of co-ordination between the different groups in National Office when preparing for new or changes to policies. The lack of consultation also irritated the social workers at the front line.

...National Office, they are changing the policies, even right down to the development plan. It is just so continual. You never know where you are each year.

...I just remember when they released this new initiative, with no consultation; they had someone from National Office come and say that it had come about from the Brown report. Why didn't they come and ask us first, it is just ludicrous. Why didn't they just come and ask us?

The impact on care and protection social workers when changes to policy and guidelines occur is not always fully understood by those who work in advisory roles in National Office. Changes to policy happen for a number of reasons such as updating documents or an event has generated political interest. Appreciating and understanding the different roles of National Office and front line social work would assist each group to be more tolerant of each other. Consulting and engaging with each other in a meaningful way could lead to the agency utilising the collective strength of its workforce to improve current policies and programmes. A significant number of initiatives which CYF have developed are admired by other child protection jurisdictions.

The Strengths and Challenges of the Role

The participants described working for CYF for the most part as positive. There was agreement that what the agency wanted to achieve was honorable and they acknowledged that significant effort and investment had been made over the years in attempting to deliver quality social work practice for children. However according to these participants there were systems and process that exasperated social workers

unnecessarily and these required attention. There were also challenges which continue to plague child protection such as the workload volumes and the inadequate resources available to service plans and orders of children and young people who are notified to CYF. The participants presented five areas which in their view required consideration and investment by agency and would make the most difference for social work staff. These sub-themes are: leadership, workload management, resources, employing social workers and celebrating success.

Leadership

Leadership that is reliable and that has integrity and a vision that supports the safety and wellbeing of children are important to staff. Social workers are passionate about their profession and they do not accept that business and management principles should override social work ethics and beliefs. Trust and support is what these participants wanted from their leaders and the profession of social work respected. The participants were unified in the view that the style and quality of the leadership was pivotal to ensuring that a site office functions well. The site manager was viewed as the primary role that provided leadership and confidence to a site office. These social workers endorsed that being able to trust their leaders and having confidence that they could make difficult decisions in the face of adversity was essential.

...I need to know that I can trust, be supported, receive a level of honesty and have a good working relationship with management. To me I need to know when I go to management that I can trust them wholeheartedly.

...Honesty and trust comes hand in hand really. I need to be able to feel comfortable and respected also. I tend to expect that from management.

...I want a competent manager. If you've got a manager who won't make the call and if they are wishy washy, it's not ideal and you are left to manage on your own and by yourself.

Experiences of unsupportive leadership and management were discussed but did not feature significantly in the debate. A leader who is trustworthy, supportive and can make difficult decisions on both business and social work issues is highly valued by

staff. A confident leader is expected to engage in debates that affect social workers such as the workload volumes and adequacy of the resource allocation to site offices. Advocating and representing workers on these issues is appreciated by staff.

Workload Management

Internationally child protection notifications have increased significantly in all western jurisdictions over the past 5-10 years. Pressure is placed on the child protection agency to respond quickly to reports of child abuse and neglect. The agency is also required to respond to numerous other issues that impact on child protection. Two challenges were identified by participants firstly, the unprecedented demands for care and protection services and secondly in attempting to manage the workload, supervisors were carrying caseloads and this precluded them from being a support to social workers. Neither strategy was ideal for the agency or its workers.

...It is like that because of the shortage. Supervisors don't get to be supervisors because they have caseloads. I only want one thing, no more caseloads for supervisors.

...It's the volume of work; we have to manage quality versus the quantity. It is because we are all overloaded.

...Caseloads, I think should be between 12-15 cases; 12 would be ideal. You would be able to breathe and the turnover of cases would be much quicker and much easier. We trialed that in our office and it's true.

High workloads and caring for staff does concern the agency at all levels. It is not acceptable for the agency to carry an unallocated case list nor is it right for social workers to agree to take a case when they are overloaded and unable to respond to the client. Being allocated a case and not being able to respond because of workloads leaves them feeling vulnerable and afraid. The challenge continues to occupy the minds of both social work professionals and the business managers. The workload issue is closely associated with the challenge of not having adequate resources to meet the expectations the public or the key commentators in the social sector. These challenges remain unresolved.

Resources

The participants were clear that when they spoke of resources that it was broader than the actual dollars allocated to site offices for the day to day costs. Resources were defined by this group as social work time (remunerated and not remunerated), access to national intervention programmes for children, placements for young people and money to support families and to action a child's plan or court order. In order to respond to children in need and deliver on the outcomes in plans which have been agreed or directed by the court, social workers need to be able to access resources and secure services. The situation of the agency not having adequate resources requires decisions to be made at a corporate level about what can be achieved. This decision should not be left for a social worker to shoulder alone.

...When we have staff down [vacancies], we carry that extra load, it does get to you. You think you just give and give; none of us work 40 hours. We work long hours, it appals other professionals. I was on call all weekend.

...When you come into the Department you are aware that you have to do extra but it is not until you're in the Department that you actually realise what it means and how much it does impinge on your own time. They use and abuse you until you crack.

... Some social workers don't ask for too much because they are afraid they will get slapped down. I am mindful of every tax payer's dollar I spend. We are so conscientious and frugal.

The participants recognised and accepted that there may be times that they would be required to work beyond the hours of their employment contract. All front line social workers are expected to take their turn being on call to take emergency calls in the evenings and on the weekends. The remuneration for being on call is \$1.40 an hour. Participants in this study voiced their dissatisfaction at the level of remuneration for on call services. Most social workers gave their time willingly because of their commitment to child safety. However resentment and annoyance was visible in the discussion when they spoke of the continuous expectation of the agency that social

workers would work until the job was done in spite of the extra hours and their own personal wellbeing.

Employing Social Workers

The negative public image of CYF curbs the desire of some social workers to work in child protection. The environment is portrayed as harsh and there are times when workers are afraid and anxious. Choosing to apply to work in a child protection social work role does require serious thought and contemplation. The participants provided these insights to prospective social workers.

...This is a very challenging role. I think young social workers who are eager bring enthusiasm. However they have to be realistic as there will be disappointments. They have to be real about what they can do.

...I would advise them to have a good look at why they want to work in this arena and why they are picking social work. Unless you have drive and passion you will not make it. Being a statutory social worker means children will depend on you.

...Telling applicants that child protection is a different type of social work. If it is not for them they must not to hesitate to leave. It does not mean that you are not a good social worker.

Attracting qualified social workers is one component of securing a capable and competent workforce. Retaining these social workers is more of a challenge. Providing information to applicants on what they can reasonably expect when they enter the child protection field was considered essential to managing new social workers' expectations. The participants also felt it was important that the agency took the time to acknowledge the efforts and contributions of their staff and joined with them to celebrate their achievements. This demonstration of appreciation could assist with retaining workers. Most of these suggestions do not require any financial resources. It requires managers, practice leaders, supervisors and National Office staff to make time and appreciate the small but important things that happen in the agency.

Celebrating Success

Child protection social workers are required to engage and interact with many individuals when intervening in a child's life. These interactions are not always pleasant. There are circumstances when a social worker has to take action that is ugly and personally undesirable such as removing a child from their parent. There have also been many actions that have been taken by social workers where children and their families have benefited from the support and service plans formulated by these workers. There was agreement by these participants that being acknowledged and recognised for good work and consistent effort should occur more regularly than it does at present.

...We have a job where the public does not always understand the role. We are not told regularly enough that we do a good job. I don't expect it now.

...Guess what, you get told you are doing such a good job, and you get given a pen.

...We all come to work because we are determined and we feel challenged. I have a little worry and I question 'how come I do not feel like that'.

Two participants balanced these comments with acknowledging CYF and the contribution it makes to protecting children.

...Every time I have left, I have come back. I have come to believe we can make a difference working in the Department.

The final and concluding quote:

...I never question why I get out of bed and come to work each day. I thoroughly enjoy my work, a good enough reason don't you think. I couldn't see myself anywhere else.

The responses identified that recognition and appreciation does make a difference for these workers and how they feel about their role. Notwithstanding the calls for the

agency to be more active in recognising achievements, the participants reiterated that their commitment was to child safety and wellbeing, to the organisational mission and to the agency, CYF.

Summary

This chapter has summarised the discussion of the focus group and their insights into why some statutory social workers choose a career in child protection and what motivates them to stay in this field. It identifies the support mechanisms that are important to their work and the strengths and challenges of the role. These participants have been in the role between five and ten years.

There was clarity in this group that choosing to work in the statutory care and protection field as a social worker was primarily because of their commitment to child safety and their belief that their efforts could make a difference in the life of a child. The principle of 'doing no further harm to a child' was a fundamental tenet. Continuing to be passionate and committed to children was considered to be an essential element in sustaining the challenges of the role. The role did provide workers with job satisfaction.

In order to do the role well, the quality and the availability of the support functions were vital. The role does require infrastructural support and for that support to be accessible to front line social workers. The provision of supervision and having a strong relationship with a competent supervisor was identified as fundamental and this helped to maintain a high standard of social work practice. The disclosure that supervisors carry caseloads and that supervision is not always available or effective are significant concerns that require attention. The responsibility for self care was seen as principally the role of the individual social worker and their supervisor. Taking advantage of the conditions available in their contracts such as annual leave would assist social workers to keep good health and remain emotionally well. Relationships were viewed as a critical part of the role. Transparency and trust were essential components of these engagements. Colleagues, supervisors and family were considered key support people. Operational policies and accessibility to nationally managed programmes and placements were considered to be support mechanisms for the role. At times these functions were a source of frustration and

irritation for workers. The lack of co-ordination and understanding of the different functions, the National Office role and the front line social work role, continued to build resentment and alienation in both areas.

The debate was active regarding the strengths and challenges of the role. Strong leadership provided the participants with confidence to undertake their role. There was an expectation that trust and support would be provided to them by their leaders. The lack of support from their manager left social workers feeling vulnerable. The volume of work continues to increase. In order to manage this concern social workers identified that supervisors carrying caseloads was one of the strategies used to address the unmet demand for social work services. Social workers have also donated to the agency many hours of their own time in order to respond to child safety concerns. Access to adequate resources in order to deliver on the expectations of the leadership group continues to be a challenge. The difficulties experienced by social workers in accessing programmes, care placements and money for children particularly those with behavioural problems causes them distress and anxiety. Attracting and retaining social workers in the care and protection role continues to be an issue. In order to prepare new comers for the role the participants believed that tempering expectations was critical. The opportunity to discuss child protection as a specialised field with the prospective social worker was considered a strategy worthy of consideration. Providing the new entrants with both the positive and more challenging aspects of the role was thought to be important information for potential colleagues. Finally, taking the time to celebrate success and acknowledge achievements contributes to social workers feeling valued and appreciated. The role is complex and there are times when workers are required to deal with tragic and difficult circumstances. The individuals in the agency whose roles have authority and influence could take a proactive role in acknowledging and celebrating the achievements of their staff and the contributions they make on behalf of children. The next chapter discusses the findings of the individual in-depth interviews and the focus group interviews and connects these to theory and to the literature.

Section Four: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Chapter Six Discussion of Findings

The impetus for this study was the desire to understand why some social workers make deliberate choices to stay and work in child protection when they know that the environment is challenging and inherently stressful (Fox, Burnham, Miller & Barbee, 2000; Schneiderman, 2005). It has been widely published that child protection agencies internationally are experiencing difficulties in recruiting and retaining social work staff. Despite the difficulties and the poor public image of child protection agencies, some social workers make considered decisions to stay in this field of work. Understanding what matters to these social workers and why they chose to remain in child protection provides a basis for agencies to develop and administer a strategic response which could influence more workers to remain working in statutory social work.

The theoretical framework adopted by this research derived from perspectives on resilience. This chapter presents the analysis of the findings and examines these for illuminations and insights into why these social workers choose to stay. There are three themes that are considered significant from the study: the attraction of the child protection role, the support mechanisms for child protection social work and the strengths and challenges of child protection social work.

The Attraction of the Child protection Role

There are two parts to this section, the attraction of the child protection role and the challenging nature of the work. The findings of the two methods, the focus group and the individual interviews employed in this research confirm the results of other studies that child protection social work role is considered to be difficult, unpredictable and at times dispiriting work (Franklin & Parton, 1991; Barak et al., 2001; Schneiderman, 2005). However, notwithstanding the myriad of negative aspects that are associated with this role, the findings confirm that these social workers have a profound level of commitment and dedication to child protection and child wellbeing outcomes. These workers understand the political nature of the environment in which they operate, that the workload is heavy and the agency struggles for adequate resources to assist their clients (Cockburn, 1994; Schorr, 2000;

Light, 2003). They are aware that the reputation and public image of social work and child protection agencies is negative and cynical. Despite the context, the participants report the role to be rewarding and that striving to keep children safe and free from harm does motivate and encourage them to be determined and manage the barriers which are inherent in child protection work. The risks that are associated with this work are offset by a social worker's personal commitment to child safety and a belief in the mission and values of their agency (Pines & Aronson, 1988; Landsman, 2001; Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2002). The organisational mission according to the literature usually reflects a social worker's purpose for working in child welfare (Samantrai, 1992; Rycraft, 1994). CYF's mission is 'Safe children and young people in strong families and responsive communities; free from abuse, free from neglect free from offending' (CYF Annual Report, 2005-2006:2). This mission aligns and connects with the personal commitment of these workers to keeping vulnerable children safe. There is no dispute that the agency and the social workers' goals for children are the same. However the system at times is viewed as ineffective and it fails to fulfill the organisational goals and mission. This is frustrating for social workers, leaving them feeling disillusioned with the system (Munro, 2002; Buckley, 2003; Zell, 2006). Making a difference, helping to stop the cycle of abuse and making things better for families was found to be the glue that kept these social workers engaged and motivated to remain working in statutory social work.

The Challenging Nature of the Work

A consistent finding was the challenging nature of the role. New Zealand's child welfare legislation (CYPF Act 1989, NZ) requires statutory social workers to consider and balance the intent of this law. Child rescue, child safety and family preservation principles are not always easy to balance. It is not surprising that the role is defined as being hard. There was a belief that in order to be successful there needed to be a good fit with the agency and that social workers were able to develop the attributes and competencies that were needed in care and protection work. It was their skill and knowledge and ability to carry out the work that would assist these social workers to sustain the requirements of child protection work (Reagh, 1994; Rycraft, 1994). These workers have to be able to manage conflict, high levels of emotion and make critical decisions on limited information within a volatile political

context. These demands are all part of a statutory worker's day (McMahon, 1998; Beckett, 2003).

It is unlikely that every client or family will be compliant and agree with investigations outcomes, plans or court orders. There will be disappointments and unforeseen responses from clients such as anger. Resilience, knowledge, skill, a supportive supervisor and colleagues are support features which assist workers to reflect on their case planning and decisions. These mechanisms both formal and informal can help build a social worker's confidence, master the subject matter and assist them face unexpected events or challenges (Egan, 1993; Smith, 2005). There were disclosures that the job did keep them awake at night from time to time. Some participants spoke of worrying if they had done enough for a child, made the right placement decisions, or even taken the right action (McMahon, 1998; Strolin, McCarthy & Caringi, 2003). No evidence was found which contradicted the position that child protection work was challenging.

Although the work was viewed as challenging, it was interesting to note that some social workers believed this work was their calling and child protection work was considered to be a vocation. Hope was expressed that their efforts would contribute to being part of an intervention strategy which halted a cycle of abuse for future generations. There was a view that their mission and purpose was a long term goal and that they needed to be realistic and to temper their idealism that they could save every child. The social workers who survive in the role are aware that regardless of skill and knowledge they can not keep all children safe or prevent some children being abused and neglected (Westbrook et al., 2006). There are challenges to this view in the literature. There are assertions some social workers are not able to manage their expectations of saving all children. Their notions of achieving miracle outcomes and believing that all clients are motivated to change require moderation. Failure by clients to meet this expectation can prove to be devastating for these workers (Ratliff, 1988; Van der Walt, 1993). It is critical that supervisors address issues such as resistant behaviour, disengagement and refusal by clients to work positively with their staff. Being able to respond and address these concerns with clients will require consideration, skill and reflection (Le Cory & Rank, 1987).

The selfless motivators of care and protection social workers are repeated many times in the literature (Samantrai, 1992; Rycraft 1994; Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2002). These social workers are driven by achieving good outcomes for clients, a belief that what they do makes a difference for children and the work is personally meaningful. They believe that this role is worthy of their investment of time, their skills, and knowledge (Vandenberghe, 1999; Casey Foundation, 2003; Westbrook et al., 2006). However the child protection role does not stand alone and social workers can not undertake this work in isolation. The role requires infrastructure support mechanisms such as administrative and technological services to complement the work. The agency has a responsibility to ensure the tools and the documentation such as policy and procedures are clear, concise and accessible.

The Support Mechanisms for Child Protection Social Work

The discussion on supportive mechanisms was broad. The significant areas in this section are: supervision, self care, relationships, technology, policy and guidelines, and training. The value and effectiveness of these support mechanisms was to a degree, dependent on the worker's willingness and competence to use the tools and support systems. The agency needed to define the expectations on how and in what circumstances the tools and systems could be utilised. This was considered important if the agency wished the workers to use the tools consistently and successfully integrate these mechanisms into daily social work practice.

Supervision

Supervision was considered an essential support mechanism for social workers. The findings suggested that a positive relationship with the supervisor served not only to provide casework and clinical guidance; it also provided the social worker with a level of confidence and security. The supervisor was considered a person who would guide and nurture social workers in their role and be the key protector on their behalf if required. The absence of supervision called into question the ability of social workers to function professionally, practice safely and to critically reflect on their work. Interestingly, although supervision was considered by the participants to be a vital component for safe practice, the findings indicated that social workers did not view the agency as valuing or appreciating the role that supervision plays in the social work profession. It was reported that the supervision policy of the agency is

applied inconsistently and that there is superficial monitoring of the quality of supervision. A number of social workers were not receiving any form of supervision or professional oversight.

The studies which have investigated the retention of child protection social workers have almost universally found that supervision is the one aspect which correlates the strongest to retaining social workers (Fleisher, 1985; Barak et al., 2001). Quality supervision is the professional mechanism that applies rigor, allows time and space for reflection and an opportunity to challenge and to be nurtured. A competent supervisor strongly influences a social workers' decision to continue employment with the organisation. Supervision also makes the job manageable (Siefert, Jayatne & Chess, 1991; Pierce, 1993; Bernatovicz, 2000; Wells, 2006). In contrast however one study on 'resilience among social workers' undertaken by Amrani-Cohen (1998) found that emotional support by supervisors was not significantly related to job resiliency. This finding is not consistent with other research and therefore requires analysing to ascertain the premise on which this finding was made. According to those interviewed for this study the forum of supervision was viewed as one of the primary mechanisms which guide and extend a social worker's skills and confidence. The presence of a caring competent and protective factor such as the supervisor helps to build worker resilience (Egan, 1993). The mastering of social work skills increases a social workers' confidence and strengthens their resilience. Having the fortitude to bounce back from stressful events enables reflection and this can influence an individuals desire to remain employed in this field of practice (Garmezy, 1985; Masten, 2001).

In 2003 the Social Workers Registration Act became law in New Zealand. This Act suggests any individuals who define themselves as a social worker is registered. The regulatory body determines a social worker's fitness to practice. It is expected that a registered social worker seek and engage in supervision in professional practice on an ongoing and regular basis (New Zealand Social Workers Registration Board Code of Conduct, 2005) In most other social work agencies in New Zealand including CYF there is policy which specifies that participating in clinical supervision on a regular basis is mandatory. There has been a strong commitment to quality supervision particularly in CYF over the years however sustaining the commitment

has proved to be extremely difficult. Jenkins (2004) workforce report identified that supervision was not available to all social workers in CYF despite the mandatory policy. The competing demands such as performance measures, growing unallocated lists and loss of experienced staff contributes to supervision being a lesser priority for the business leaders of CYF. One participant revealed that she was not actively engaged in supervision. This worker's professional and personal wellbeing should concern the agency. The literature forewarns child welfare agencies that inadequate and insufficient supervision is an important factor in a workers decision to leave their care and protection role (Samantrai, 1992; United States General Accounting Office, 2003).

Self care

Closely associated with the supervision function is the physical and emotional wellbeing of a social worker. Looking after one's self and achieving work-life balance enabled workers to cope with the daily demands and some of the unpleasant facets of the role. It is in the agency's best interest to encourage their staff to take their entitled leave and to monitor the number of hours staff actually work. Working long hours can lead to burnout and exhaustion. The critical nature of the role and the volume of work can easily seduce a worker into believing that they are unable to take time away from the work place. Often organisational pressures, other team members' plans and unforeseen circumstances such as covering for others when they are sick, leave workers feeling pressured to continue working thereby placing their own wellbeing at risk (Morrison, 1990; Wagner, van Reyk, & Spence, 2001; Smith, 2005).

The finding of this study suggests that as a social worker matures into the care and protection role, self care became more of a focus for them. It was also in the latter part of a social worker's career that it appears they became more proactive in taking steps to manage and take responsibility for their wellbeing. Self care presented itself in a number of guises. Annual leave, taking breaks often was one strategy, undertaking different roles within the agency, planning the work day so that going home was as close to the official finish time as possible and socialising with colleagues and partners was considered to be self care strategies. Some social workers made the decision not to have their names appear in public documents such

as the phone books as a way of separating family and professional time. Taking the annual leave regularly without feelings of guilt was highlighted as important to social workers. It was suggested that it would be easier for an organisation to take steps to promote and be supportive of self care rather than rely on intrinsic rewards to retain staff. However self care should not be a substitute for agency care and the limitations of any individual must be a key consideration (Morrison, 1990; Smith, 2005). The responsibility for work-life balance and self care belongs to both the agency and the individual social worker. Supportive formal and informal relationships where trust is a basic ingredient can also be used by workers to debrief and debate any concerns that may affect their work or emotional wellbeing.

Relationships

Quality relationships and the collective contributions of others were viewed as an essential element in supporting child safety outcomes. It is not surprising that this finding concurred with previous studies which found that relationships are key support mechanism for social workers. These relationships can assist in helping child protection workers survive the daily pressures and challenges of their work. This study found the relationship with supervisors (Samantrai, 1992; Rycraft, 1994; Landsman, 2001) and their team as well as other colleagues to be a significant support mechanism (Morrison, 2006; Tham, 2007). Team identification and the sense of belonging to a team were highly valued and to some degree the sense of belonging also made the work bearable and the worker more resilient (Wagner, van Reyk & Spence, 2001; Ellis, Ellett & DeWeaver, 2007). Social workers drew their support; care and connectedness from their peers as well as their personal friends, their family and whanau, this support strengthened their resilience. (Grasso, 1994; Morrison, 2006). Having access to a network of relationships that offered coaching, provided guidance and gave social workers a sense of being cared for and a sense of belonging. Being part of professional group, the presence of a caring and competent adult such as the supervisor or practice leader to help support social workers does increase their confidence and resilience (Garmezy, 1985; Gilligan, 2001). The availability of electronic communication and access to colleagues, supervisors and other professionals provides another medium of support for social workers. A friendly email is always welcomed. Again in opposition to the body of evidence in the literature the Amrani-Cohen (1998) study refutes that emotional support by co-

workers and supervisors is significantly related to a social workers' job resiliency. However this study does not concur with Amrani-Cohen's findings.

Technology

Technology has had a huge impact on social work practice and the delivery of social work. Computers are now an intrinsic part of daily life in CYF. Social workers need access to a computer in order to undertake almost all of their daily activities. Technology, (the computer) is used to record case work progress, for caseload management, performance and business reporting, to support and guide social workers to make reasoned decisions on different aspects of social work such as the risk framework and it is also used to seek approval for plans and to expend financial resources (Cwikel & Cnaan, 1991; Ames, 1999). Technology has also become a key instrument for communication. The intranet makes available a plethora of information to staff such as policy and corporate documents, performance measures by location, staff contact lists and weekly messages from the Chief Executive; the list is extensive.

The intent of the technological advances in human services was to improve accountability, consistency and record information with particular emphasis on administration. Over time a business and management focus has led some social workers to believe their skills were not valued; completion times and quantity of work rather than quality social work decisions was more valued by the organisation (Dunn, 2001; Munro, 2004). These concerns are supported by a number of researchers who believe that technology is being used to monitor activity and surveillance has become the key driver for the agency. Some social workers have been resistant to becoming dependent on computers (Jones, 2001; Moses, Weaver, Furman & Lindsey, 2003; Burton & van den Broek, 2006). The arguments which dismiss these concerns are inconsistent application, spasmodic use of the tools by workers, as well as a general lack of competency and computer literacy. This impedes the agency realising the benefits of technology (Hopkins & Hyde, 2002).

Two decades has seen technology advance dramatically from a focus of administrative support and gathering statistics to providing a range of data such as financial, performance and business information. Standard screening tools and

assessments tests have also been integrated onto the system and more latterly decision support tools that are logic based programmes are being made available to provide practitioners with various social work practice recommendations (Cwikel & Cnaan, 1991). It would not be unreasonable for a social worker to believe that a speedy and terse response from leaders of the agency would occur if a serious event happened to a client where it could be evidenced that a judgment had been made by a social worker which did not comply with a computer generated recommendation. Regardless of the explanations why a different decision was made, a social worker is likely to be confronted by administrators and politicians who espouse that the technological recommendations are based on accumulated empirical experience and errors in practice decisions are therefore likely to be minimised (Cwikel & Cnaan, 1991; Sapey, 1997). It can be argued that this position may leave a worker afraid to challenge the computerised decision and this immobilises them from making their own professional judgments. There is commentary which disputes that technology changes how social work is practiced. These arguments highlight that computers and programmes are not good or bad and are value free (Marshall, 1997; Sapey, 1997). It is argued that it is the way the technology is used by practitioners that influences social work practice.

However, technology is now one of the support mechanisms that social workers use daily. Therefore it is critical that social work values are part of the designing and planning process. This will provide the opportunity to challenge how the technology is being used and to ensure social work values are integrated into the design of any new technological advancement. Social work expertise must also be present when policy and guidelines are formulated. Their expertise will give confidence to other workers to utilise the computer programmes. Advancements in technology in partnership with social workers could prove to benefit clients and administrators in child welfare (Bewley, 1998: 26).

Policy and Guidelines

The analysis of the data identified that operating policies and guidelines were important to care and protection social workers. The majority of participants emphasised the agency's policies and procedures offered them a degree of safety and protection in their work. Well considered and the most current policy provides

guidance to a worker and enables them to meet agency expectations. Interestingly, most of the debate focused on the difficulties of accessing policy documents. The lack of co-ordination of policy documentation frustrated staff. Policy documentation was able to be accessed on the network and hard copies of the policies were located in most site offices. At an intellectual level social workers understood that the policies are intended to provide a level of safety for the social worker and the procedures were primarily to guide and provide direction. It is therefore the responsibility of the agency to ensure that operating policies, the guidelines and procedures are clear, concise, current and accessible (Dyson, 2005). However the participants expressed limited confidence that the policy documentation either on line or in hard copy were the most current.

There were arguments which suggested there were some policies which do not sit comfortably with social workers. As new strategies or political edits emerged, child welfare policies were at times considered to be formulated on a reactive basis and within a risk and management framework rather than meeting the needs of children (Corby, 1996). The quest to be expedient and fix an issue leads to the establishment of stringent guidelines which focused on compliance rather than on best practice social work (Zell, 2006). The volumes of policies and regulations which workers were required to know and use have been described as formidable, complex and difficult to navigate. As the formulation of policy becomes increasingly prescriptive and defensive, the ambiguous and uncertain nature of social work is overlooked and discounted as irrelevant (Berridge & Brodie, 1998:172). The agency expectation that social workers will comply with every policy or know of the existence of a particular policy is neither realistic nor reasonable. The formulation and access to policies are considered to be a major concern rather than tools for social workers to utilise. Updating current policy documentation, reviewing operational policies for relevancy, providing training for staff on how to best use the technology and securing social work input into policy formulation requires attention.

Training

The contribution to the discussion on professional development and qualifications was sourced primarily from those who participated in the individual interviews. These workers spoke at length about the complex nature of social work, the value of

having a social work qualification and having regular access to training particularly in the formative years of a care and protection career. Having a social work qualification provided these workers with measured confidence. They believed the complexity of the work demanded a solid foundation of social work knowledge and skill. This foundation prepared them to be able to take other opportunities to extend their professional development in their chosen field. They believed professional credibility was enhanced by having a New Zealand social work qualification.

This position is well supported by the literature with studies that identify child welfare employees with a social work degree are better prepared for child protection work than employees with non-social work degrees or no formal social work education (Lieberman, Hornby & Russell, 1988; Dhooper, Royse & Wolfe, 1990; Albers, Reilly & Rittner, 1993; Ellett, 2006). Child protection agencies that require a minimum qualification of a bachelor of social work degree (BSW) experience lower turnover rates and there is growing evidence that graduates score higher on child welfare competency measures (Fox, Burnham, Miller & Barbee, 2000).

However in contrast Perry's (2006) provocative study raised doubts about the importance of educational backgrounds for child protection workers. He asserted there was no notable difference observed in the performance of workers regardless of educational background and that educational background of child protection workers was a poor predictor of performance. These findings evoked strong debate, controversy and limited support (Ellet, 2006; Holosko, 2006; Whitaker & Clark, 2006). Perry's question of whether or not you have to be a social worker to be a child welfare worker continues to generate fierce debate. Critics, spectators and administrators in New Zealand could use Perry's argument to manage the recruitment and retention crisis and the burgeoning workload of CYF. To contemplate this strategy seriously would undo the significant progress that has been made over the last two decades to up skill and professionalise social workers who are employed by CYF. At present 58% of front line social workers in CYF have a recognised social work qualification (Department of CYF, 2006). The argument that child protection could be viewed as a vocation in which individuals are able to come from a variety of different disciplines and be warranted to practice in child protection by way of on the job training is in conflict with the significant body of literature that

argues a social work qualification supports a social worker in their role. Social workers with higher education are more competent and better prepared for the stresses that are typically encountered in child welfare than those who do not have a social work qualification (Barak et al., 2001; Dickinson & Perry, 2001; Strolin, McCarthy & Caringi, 2003). Public welfare agencies have historically been viewed as a key training ground for social workers and on the job training is recognised in the literature as being an important resource to social workers (Rubin, 1982; Dickinson & Perry, 2001). The participants valued the training delivered by CYF's Learning and Development Unit. A consistent theme in the conversations was the value of the training in the first two years of employment. The benefit of introductory training for new or returning employees to child protection work is strongly supported in the literature as well as continuing access to learning opportunities to enhance skills and knowledge (Balfour and Neff, 1993; Brown, 2000; Barak et al., 2001; Zell, 2006). Recognising the importance of learning opportunities, the New Zealand Social Workers Registration Board requires registered social workers to undertake at least 150 hours of professional development over a period of three years as a minimum to qualify for the annual practicing certificate. This requirement strategically sets the stage to further augment social work as recognised profession and to cement professional development as an integral part of practicing social work in New Zealand. CYF could consider the bench mark set by the New Zealand Social Workers Registration Board as a minimum standard of training hours for its social workers. The investment of training will support and strengthen the confidence of social workers and meet the daily challenges and dilemmas of child protection work.

The Strengths and Challenges of Child Protection Work

The third theme discusses what emerged as strengths and challenges. There are six sub-themes. These are public image, leadership: management vs. social work, National Office and the front line, workload management, services to Maori and celebrating success.

This study found that workers in the arena of child protection strive to deliver the best service they can for children. There have been times however when 'best' efforts are perceived by the general public, politicians and key stakeholders as not

good enough and fall well short of societal expectations (Mason, 1992; Brown, 2000; Laming, 2003). Child protection agencies attract significant political interest and negative public commentary. There are many examples where well meaning individuals who consider themselves experts express opinions and provide recommendations to strengthen and improve the care and protection system. Social workers have been criticised and challenged ruthlessly by media. These workers are expected to be resilient and stoic when there is debate and critical commentary in the public arena. Factors which strengthen a worker's resilience are having a mastery of the subject and the support of a supervisor or colleagues. Social workers will advocate strongly on matters concerning professional social work ethics with managers and advocate for staff wellbeing. Participating in these activities requires courage, confidence and resilience. Notwithstanding the constant condemnation of care and protection social workers and welfare agencies by media and the public, the participants in this study argued the child protection role has strengths and many children benefit from the work undertaken by social workers. There was no dispute that there will always be challenges and improvements to be considered and implemented into child protection services. These improvements were welcomed by these professionals.

Public Image

The participants spoke at length about being the subject of public criticism and ridicule when an event or case found its way into the public arena. If child is hurt or killed assigning blame, responsibility, and questioning the professional competence of the social worker takes centre stage as the lead story on the national airways regardless of CYF's involvement. The reality is negative stories are of significant interest to the media and are replayed continuously. The majority of success stories go unreported and unrecognised. However at a local level, workers reported positive feedback had been received from stakeholders which publicly acknowledged staff.

This finding recognises the image of New Zealand's child protection agency mirrors that of most other western child protection agencies which is that it is indecisive and for the most part incompetent and over zealous. The likelihood of this perception changing in the near future is extremely limited (McMahon, 1998; Munro, 2002). The fact that these social workers are dedicated and committed to the mission of

child safety and that many children have benefited from their intervention does however provide opportunities for the agency to report stories to media outlets and within their communities. More importantly the active nurturing and maintaining of relationships with the press could influence how stories are reported and portrayed. The lack of interest by the media and politicians to report good news stories is a barrier. It does require the agency to think about having more proactive responses when confronted by challenging reporters. The availability of current stories and media releases to journalist that highlights excellent organisational performance as well as professional achievements provides the opportunity for stories to be used and featured. Highlighting both business performance and professional social work stories would be beneficial to the agency and provide a balance which could be used to improve public confidence. Journalists often struggle to meet deadlines and editor's timeframes therefore easy access to well constructed feature stories may be a way of highlighting the agency's leadership role in the social sector as well as enhancing its image from time to time (Edwards & Callingham, 2000).

Leadership, Management vs. Social Work

One of the tensions that participants identified was the subtle erosion of influence of social work values and ethics and the increase in management and business principles in the child protection field. The organisation has been the subject of significant changes in the past decade, some self imposed, other changes were politically motivated (Brown, 2000; State Services Commission, 2006). Participants reported that the child protection system was now being driven more by performance and output drivers, rather than professional social work concerns. They believed that ticking boxes on the computer was more important to the leadership group than engaging with clients. The focus on policy and compliance, increased paper work, performance targets, lack of autonomy in decision making, uncompensated and unremunerated work were indicators used to support these claims. As a general finding the context and bureaucratic changes have led to privileging management principles rather than social work ethics and values as the primary focus in the care and protection agency

The literature discusses the complexities of the relationship between rules and discretion. The conflicting ideologies of performance and advocacy create anxiety

and resentment for social workers (Morrison, 1990; Vandenberghe, 1999; Laking, 2003). The bureaucracy, the paperwork, the surveillance and compliance focus leaves social workers feeling no longer trusted or acknowledged for their skills. An over emphasis on internal controls, quality checks, reporting and ticking of boxes can lead to social workers being trapped in a bureaucratic whirlpool (Gifford, Zammuto & Goodman, 2002) resulting in the social work principles of care and support being left to the lower echelons of the hierarchy to utilise (Jones, 2001; Bednar, 2003). However an alternate view is the two disciplines need to co-exist harmoniously. The different perspectives and principles should be used to complement and work constructively to achieve the agency's strategic objectives (Schneiderman, 2005; Wells, 2006). The agency could also choose to recognise that the assumption which is sometimes made that skilled competent social work staff will preferably seek a career path in professional supervision or clinical leadership may be flawed. Utilising and nurturing talented social workers who are competent in both disciplines would enhance decision making at leadership forums (Egan & Kadushin, 2004; Westbrook et al., 2006). There has been no evidence found which disputes that business managers strive to achieve the same goals as social work professionals. Securing more funds, achieving excellent performance targets and being able to demonstrate a return on investment of the tax payers dollar is a necessary skill that is needed in the care and protection agency. Securing the confidence of the agency's political minister and the advisors of the Treasury Department positions agency leaders to be able to advocate and influence decisions on behalf of the clients and staff (Gifford, Zammuto & Goodman, 2002). These forums and key individuals are usually located near parliament or the child protection National Office. Professional social work voices need to be heard in partnership with the business managers to advocate and influence at these forums and with stakeholders as both sets of expertise are critical to making a difference for children. It would be advantageous for both disciplines seeking to understand each others' pressures and to work collectively to appreciate and respond to what is important for each discipline as well as the child protection system.

National Office and the Front Line

The leadership for CYF has traditionally been located in Wellington. The functions undertaken at National Office are the primary interface with Ministers and the

political interface on behalf of the agency. The formulation of policy, budget bids, programme development activities are almost always co-ordinated from that central location. Interestingly the participants who had held management roles such as supervisors provided mostly supportive comments about the services they received from National Office. Those who worked in site offices and in the field were less complimentary and considered the demands from National Office to be unreasonable. The amount of resources perceived to be allocated to National Office generated a degree resented by participants, particularly when caseloads were continuing to increase and resources for clients were scarce. The stark difference in understanding by some staff regarding the functions of National Office suggests a strategy should be considered to address this gap in understanding. The lack of appreciation by the frontline staff of the work that is undertaken at National Office to support them in their role requires addressing.

The literature affirms it is not uncommon for government departments including the child protection agency to be subjected to the political pressures. The demands and reporting requirements for most operational government departments are significant such as Health, Police and Justice. The National Office attempts to shield frontline workers from these demands. Child protection agencies generate intense interest from politicians and the media. There are many hours spent in the head office responding to questions, answering requests for information and servicing the machinery of government. These activities are not necessarily understood or valued by social workers; nonetheless these tasks are part of the functions expected of government departments and part of the democratic process (Gifford, Zammuto & Goodman, 2002; Wells, 2006). Social workers tend to have a low level of trust and be resistant to directives or initiatives from National Office that appear to shift from the organisational mission to a resource focus (Wagner, van Reyk, Spence, 2001; Gifford, 2002; Hopkins & Hyde, 2002). The collective investment of social work and machinery of government activities requires understanding and acknowledgement by the respective groups. Each of these activities is dependent on the other. The value of the two disciplines coming together to debate and discuss issues which concern the agency such as strategies to managing the burgeoning caseloads, inadequate resources or meeting performance targets should not be discounted or underestimated.

Workload Management

The participants identified the need to have a tool which would assist the agency and social workers to manage the relentless workload. A workload management tool was important to these workers. They believed such a tool would enable a finite number of cases to be allocated to a social worker. This would provide a degree of protection for them and prevent attempts to increase caseloads above the agreed number. Utilising this opportunity would provide time to deliver quality social work rather than quantity being the driver. Their comments confirmed that in order to keep abreast of the workload, supervisors were carrying caseloads. This situation was recognised as unacceptable however they believed there were no other alternatives available to address the overwhelming demands particularly when a social worker leaves and there is no immediate replacement.

The caseloads for social workers have been recognised as untenable and efforts have been made by a number of jurisdictions to cap the number of cases a social worker should manage (Dickinson & Perry, 2002; United States General Accounting Office, 2003; Smith, 2005). In 2006, CYF defined a case range for a youth justice social worker to be up to 18 cases (CYF, 2006). There is no such specification for care and protection. Over half of these cases are indigenous children. They are over represented at all levels of the care and protection system such as the number of notifications which are received by the child protection agency and the number of children in care. Indigenous children and their families would benefit from receiving a timely response and for the worker to have an appropriate level of cultural knowledge and understanding of Maori society and families.

Services to Maori

Responding and providing services for Maori clients and opportunities for development of Maori staff were considered by participants to be an area which required both investment and improvement. The Children Young Persons and their Families Act (1989) provided the opportunity for community agencies, Iwi and other cultural organisations such as Pacific groups to apply for approval to deliver services on behalf of the state. This legislation is not prescriptive. It provides the opportunity for a broad range of contracts to be negotiated. Community agencies and cultural groups and the contracting section of CYF negotiate service contracts. Opinions

were expressed which conveyed frustration and disappointment that Iwi and Maori providers had been confined to a detailed and narrow service scope and these community agencies were managed and confined to being a contracted service arm of CYF. The concern identified by the participants' was the contracting framework specifications used by CYF. They believed this limited prospects for Iwi and Maori providers to move beyond the fee for service arrangement (Doolan, 2005). The participants believed this stifled the progression of the commitments and the full implementation of recommendations articulated in the Ministerial report Puao-Te-Ata-Tu (1986). They also commented that CYF's commitment to invest and strengthen the capacity and capability of Maori staff had been diluted over time and that there is no visible demonstration of commitment to Maori staff in the current environment.

The frustration experienced by the participants is reflected in the literature. The funeral progress towards the manifestation of Iwi and Maori social services organisations has been commented on numerous occasions (Bradley, 1997; Irwin & Cox, 1999; Brown, 2000; Doolan, 2005). Departmental guidelines for contracting for social services published in 1992 (Department of Social Welfare, 1992) espoused the desire to have a fairer and more culturally appropriate means of expressing funding arrangements. Despite the numerous attempts and considerable investment by the Community Funding Agency and CYF to re-launch the impetus to achieve greater representation and a broader range of services being delivered by Iwi organisations, history confirms failure (Shirley, 1992; Bradley, 1997; Brown, 2000; Doolan, 2005; Tomlins-Janke, 2005). The methodology of the funding and contracting processes limits Iwi or Maori social services to 'deliver services in its own unique way and the nature of the contract predetermines that Iwi are merely agents of the crown rather than agents for their communities' (Doolan, 2005). Other writers discussed the presence of power relationships such as CYF as the funder and the recognition by Iwi of being disadvantaged by engaging fully in these relationships (Doolan, 2005; Munford & Walsh-Tapiata, 2005). CYF could take the opportunity to consider the possibilities of re-engagement with Iwi as a provider and partner of statutory services rather than an agent which supplies services on behalf of CYF.

The benefits of working co-operatively with Iwi to provide services for children requires a respectful relationship which values the uniqueness of each entity, it requires on-going commitment, compromise and trust. It is right to acknowledge that there has been some success with partnering with Iwi over the past twenty years. Sustaining these successes can in the main, be attributed to committed individuals who work in local offices who have a shared vision and strong relationships with local Iwi. Some staff choose to stay in child protection and CYF to nurture and keep alive the vision and success that was Puaoteata-Tu.

Celebrating Success

This finding supports the importance of managers and supervisors acknowledging staff and proactively celebrating their successes. To some degree this means that leaders need to place more emphasis on their people rather than policy and infuse into the culture permission to celebrate. The fact that participants struggled to identify examples of when and how they celebrated success provides an insight into how little these social workers believe they receive personal recognition for their efforts. It is not surprising that being recognised for effort and success has been identified as an important factor related to employee retention in child welfare. Utilising forums such as team meetings, frequent and informal feedback by managers and supervisors may strengthen social workers' commitment to child welfare and to the organisation. Being acknowledged for your efforts also builds confidence and resilience (Landsman, 2001; Ellett, Ellett & Rugutt, 2003; Westbrook et al., 2006). This finding supports the need to build both formal and informal structures to communicate appreciation, to recognise good and exceptional work and to celebrate achievements in a way that is sensitive and does not devalue the efforts of others or lessen the currency of the recognition. CYF have numerous options available to communicate with staff such as CYF intranet and personal communication from the Chief Executive and Deputy CEO. When reflecting on the contribution to supporting vulnerable children these participants speak about their unfettered efforts and their determination to do everything they can to protect children regardless of the level of anxiety and worry about whether enough has been done to keep a child safe. Protecting children was the more important goal and it is this goal that which keeps them committed to statutory child protection work.

Summary

This chapter has drawn together the key themes in the findings and connected them to the literature. Resilience theory has helped to understand how a social worker continues to sustain the day to day challenges inherent in child protection work. The importance of professional mechanisms such as supervision, the value of supportive relationships and keeping the mission and purpose at the forefront of all agency decisions are key in child protection social work.

Chapter Seven Conclusion and Recommendations

Child protection is an experience of mobility, of acting at speed to reach children, of the emotions and senses and intimate engagement with the sights, sounds and smells of others' lives and homes, their tragedy and pain, which threatens to become the workers own; of pervasive anxiety, risk, danger and despair, some joy and laughs too (Ferguson, 2004).

The main objective of the study was to examine the key factors which motivate New Zealand child protection social workers to remain in the statutory role. The work is difficult and the environment is pressured, subjected to constant criticism and change. Statutory child protection social workers in New Zealand and internationally are courageous individuals, passionate and committed to helping vulnerable children, doing what is necessary to keep them safe and free from harm. Retaining dedicated and experienced social workers in this specialist field has become a challenge. It is a significant concern for most western child protection agencies including New Zealand's welfare agency, CYF. The organisation would benefit from seeking to understand the advantages of having a resilient workforce. Mobilising strategies to strengthen worker resilience and provide support mechanisms that assist workers could lead to a reduction in the turnover of staff and increase the longevity and the number of capable and experienced social workers who operate in the care and protection field. The resources traditionally allocated for recruitment and training of new staff could be redirected to other organisational priorities.

Key Findings

This section summarises the key findings. The environment in which statutory child protection social workers operate is considered to be at the most difficult end of the social work spectrum. Notwithstanding the conditions, in this study, professionals were found to have a profound level of personal and professional commitment and dedication to child protection work and to child wellbeing outcomes. Some social workers considered this work to be their calling and that child protection was their vocation. The supportive relationship with the supervisor and the provision of quality supervision were also considered to be essential support mechanisms for

these workers and a vital component for safe practice. The supervisor was viewed as a teacher, the person in the agency who would nurture and guide them and be their key protector. However social workers did not view the agency as valuing or appreciating the pivotal role that supervision plays in social work. Some social workers were not receiving any form of supervision. The social workers in this study reported that quality relationships provide the connections and connectivity in child protection work. These relationships are not uniform and can not be prescribed. Social workers' relationships with supervisors, their team, peers, personal friends and family members were key elements in supporting them to stay in this role. Having access to a network of relationships provided these workers with a sense of belonging. The presence and the guidance of caring and competent adults increased workers' confidence and resilience.

Self care was important and the social workers in this study outlined that a social worker must be proactive and take responsibility for their own wellbeing and self care. The participants felt self care become more of a focus when they had matured into the role. However self care should not be a substitute for agency care and the limitations of any individual must be considered. The responsibility for work-life balance and self care belongs to both the agency and the individual worker. Another aspect which social workers viewed as significant was the availability and accessibility of current and concise operational policies and procedures. This provided workers with a degree of safety and protection in their work which assisted them to meet the agency's expectations. However workers expressed limited confidence in the co-ordination of policy documentation. Updating and having access to current policies and procedures and receiving training on how to use the systems was reported to be extremely important for staff. Social workers also considered that the value of having a social work qualification and having regular access to training, particularly in the formative years of a care and protection career, was vital. The complexity of the work demanded a solid foundation of social work skill and knowledge and a social work qualification provided workers with measured confidence. Opportunities for professional development and learning forums were considered to be essential and an extrinsic reward.

The social workers in this study reported that the child protection field of social work is experiencing a subtle erosion of influence and a diminishing presence of social work values and ethics. There was an assertion that there is an increase in management and business principles and that the child protection system is being driven more by performance and output drivers rather than professional social work ethics. The context and bureaucratic changes have led to management principles being the primary focus in care and protection and those services which require a social work response are seen as outputs delivered by the professional workforce. Compliance and recording imperatives on the computer are vitally important to the leadership team of the agency. Primarily this is because the organisation uses the information entered on to the system to report agency performance, work volumes, unit costing, contract management and case information. External monitors such as Treasury utilise this information and therefore it is required to be accurate and current. Workloads were also highlighted as an issue. The social workers in this study reported that the introduction of a workload management tool for care and protection work is now urgent. Unprecedented levels of demand for service and high workloads have become untenable and unacceptable for the workers. In order to address the overwhelming demand, supervisors have resorted to carrying a caseload. The social workers believed that because of the pressure on workloads there were no other alternatives available to them.

Another finding from the study concerned CYF's commitment to Maori and to Maori social work staff. The participants asserted that this aspect of the organisation requires urgent attention. The development of Maori staff was considered to be an area which required both investment and improvement. Further to this the participants reported that limited progress has been made with Iwi and Maori organisations to deliver statutory services in partnership with CYF. The current status of Iwi and Maori providers continues to be kept a contracted arm of the CYF. This contracting framework denies Iwi and Maori organisations the opportunity to broaden their scope of services to their communities. The opportunity to mobilise the full extent of Iwi and Maori skills remains dormant.

However overwhelmingly what was not dormant was the desire of these social workers to be able to celebrate what was important and to deliver social work

services in a culture where acknowledging and celebrating the achievements and successes of staff is proactively recognised by managers and supervisors. This finding identifies that statutory social workers believe there is a lack of recognition and an absence of celebration in the agency. They believed that managers and supervisors need to have systems which alert them to the efforts and achievements of their people and to take time to celebrate, have fun and reflect on the many successes that are accomplished.

Key Recommendations

Following on from these findings, it is recommended:

- That quality clinical supervision is a key deliverable in the care and protection process and that CYF considers supervision as ‘fundamental to safeguarding standards, to the development of professional expertise and to the delivery of quality care’ (Morrison, 2000:14). In order to support this position all supervisors within twelve months of their appointment to the role could be required to attend clinical supervision training and that supervisors accept accountability to provide regular clinical and administrative supervision to social work members of their team. This process will provide both the supervisor and the social worker the opportunity to discuss casework, organisational matters and any concerns held by either party. It also can be the forum the supervisor uses to enquire into the wellbeing of their worker. The agency can then have confidence that social work supervision is delivered to social work staff in line with the agency’s supervision policy, the practice standards of ANZASW and the New Zealand Social Workers Registration Board’s Code of Conduct is met at all levels of the organisation.
- That self care and work-life balance is a collective responsibility of the individual worker and the agency, CYF. In order to ensure this responsibility endures, social workers need to be made aware at the commencement of their tenure of the importance of their personal and professional health and wellbeing. The induction training which all social workers attend may be considered a suitable forum to begin the discussion and dialogue on self care.

- That urgent consideration is given to updating all current operational policy procedure and guideline documentation and that access to the documentation is made readily available to all frontline staff. Access to clear and concise social work practice policies provides a level of security and confidence for social workers and therefore the management of these documents must be reviewed regularly and kept current.
- That CYF be the lead agency that supports the professionalisation of social work by having a recruitment strategy which employs social workers who are either qualified or engaged in education that will lead to a recognised social work qualification. The judgments and decisions of these workers significantly impact and can have a lasting effect on children and families. Therefore a solid understanding of social theories, human development and the ability to critically analyse situations and critique information is a skill which is vital to assist with casework decisions. Education, information and exposure to research, new concepts and evaluation increase skills and knowledge which in turn contributes to building a confident and resilient workforce.
- That a workload management tool for the allocation of care and protection cases is implemented as soon as possible. A workload management tool will reposition the demand and supply casework responsibility from frontline social work staff and move the accountability to the senior managers of the organisation. A workload management tool will support social workers to have manageable caseloads. A workload management tool requires a collective effort between managers and social work staff to work constructively on work demand issues. Social workers will continue to have a responsibility to alert the agency managers to complex cases and also to be prepared to work on strategies to address the issues that arise from unmanageable volumes of work.
- That the status of Iwi and Maori social service organisations be accorded their right to join with the State in providing services and support for

children, their families and the community rather than be confined to being an agent of CYF. Working with Iwi and Maori social service providers as partners has the potential to increase the diversity of response and significantly increase the statutory workforce capacity.

- That CYF continue to proactively increase the number of qualified Maori staff in order to reflect the percentage of Maori children and families who require statutory social interventions. As well as being proactive in recruiting Maori staff, it is vital that the capability of current Maori staff is increased and therefore access to departmental training by Maori staff must remain a priority for CYF.
- That CYF commission research to be undertaken which examines whether there are differences between the treatment and services provided to Maori children and families as opposed to non-Maori; whether or not cultural competency and understanding is a factor and if there is racial bias at key decision making points in the system or if the practice methods used on behalf of Maori children are effective. Understanding these factors and utilising the research findings to inform a response may assist in addressing the over representation of Maori children in the system. This would result in improving the wellbeing outcomes for these children and also reducing the current negative statistics for Maori.
- That celebrating and publishing the achievements and successes of individual workers, teams and the agency, be a priority for managers and staff. Ideally, the successes will be made observable to key stakeholders and other public commentators. This will help to provide a balanced perspective when negative and unconstructive interpretations of social work are being reported and debated in the media. Unbalanced, emotive reporting and sustained attacks challenging social work credibility and integrity ultimately results in a lack of public confidence in the agency and in social work professionals. A battered workforce is less likely to be innovative and resilient. Social workers who feel vulnerable are more likely to become defensive and risk adverse when engaging with clients.

Implications

These results suggest that CYF are able to respond and act on most of the recommendations with minimal fiscal impact or disruption to its day to day operations. At the operational level CYF already has the structural mechanism albeit at the moment not active, which can enable the agency to be responsive to a significant number of the recommendations, for example, the workload management tool has been in its formative stages since 2003.

These recommendations provide CYF with guidance for managers who seek to improve the experience of social workers operating in this field of social work. First and foremost there does need to be a work climate in which learning and innovation are actively encouraged and where supervisory support engenders trust and empowerment for workers. Taking decisive action to provide social workers with what is important to them will increase the likelihood of these workers choosing to make deliberate choices to extend their tenure with the agency. From my experience I believe there is a possibility that acting on these recommendations may attract more individuals to CYF and to the social work profession.

Reflections of the Research Process

Undertaking this study has prompted a number of reflections which are noteworthy. At the time of conducting this study the researcher was a senior manager in the organisation. Several of the responses from participants' were not easy to hear. A number of comments from the researcher's perspective were considered to be unfair and inaccurate. It ignited an urge to want to defend, explain and correct the participants' views. The researcher was aware of the need to be vigilant to ensure her body language and comments remained neutral. Any comments made by the researcher were confined to seeking clarity or exploring the questions. There was an awareness of the risk that her responses either verbal or non-verbal could impact on the willingness of participants to want to continue to share information. The quality of the information provided by the participants was rich and brutally honest. The decision to meet the participants kanohi ke te kanohi (face to face) was an effective methodology. Their willingness to trust, speak frankly and share their views with a senior manager displayed their passion and courage. They were pleased to have the

opportunity to contribute to research that may improve the circumstances for other social workers and clients. The senior role the researcher held within CYF appeared to almost be irrelevant.

Embarking on the research process also provided the opportunity for the researcher to be a student and to learn about the process of research and its traditions. The learning has been significant. The links that research has to practice and policy became more evident during the closing stages of this study; for example, considering the research on resilience and how it may be of benefit to CYF managers. The agency could choose to proactively strengthen the role of supervisor as a strategy to increase resilience for statutory social workers. Research also confirms that quality training is an important factor for social workers and therefore supporting the training units to continue to deliver high quality training and to access research findings would increase the knowledge and skills of staff. This link with research may increase the retention of social workers in child protection.

Possible Future Research

One area for future research is indicated; research which examines whether the factors and concerns which encouraged qualified social workers to choose to leave statutory child protection social work were addressed by a change of employer and a change in the work environment. The disincentives of a statutory environment such as the lack of quality and timely supervision and the constant tension between attending scheduled training or dealing with the relentless workload are of much concern for social workers and are cited as reasons for leaving the child protection field. There have been numerous studies which have examined job satisfaction, recruitment and retention of social workers who work in child protection. No studies were found which investigated whether the reasons for leaving statutory social work were ameliorated by the change in their employment circumstances, for example, receiving quality and timely supervision and being confident that the agency values training and provides support for workers to attend scheduled sessions. Research on changes to employment circumstances would contribute to a better understanding of the social services employment culture and assist to highlight the needs of a qualified resilient social sector workforce.

Finally, more than 40000 vulnerable New Zealand children received support or services from this country's child protection system in 2006 (CYF, Annual Report, 2006). Statutory social workers are committed to keeping children safe and free from harm. A social worker's day is very long. They work tirelessly with other professionals, community members and families to ensure that they take as much or as little action as possible to keep a child safe and free from further harm. They advocate on behalf of their clients. Some clients are not always appreciative or welcoming of their efforts. They are courageous, passionate and dedicated individuals who do make a difference in the lives of a significant number of New Zealand children.

These workers have identified key factors which support their work, such as, quality supervision and training which assists them to continue employment in the statutory child protection field. Their work is important and the contributions and insights of the social workers who agreed to take part in this study assisted in expanding the body of knowledge in this field of practice.

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Appendix One



25 July 2005

Shannon Pakura
14 Saunders Close
Whitby
PORIRUA

Dear Shannon

Re: HEC: PN Application – 05/56
What are the motivating factors for a statutory social worker to remain in the job they do? What gets them up every morning?

Thank you for your letter.

On behalf of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved. Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents: *“This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, Palmerston North Application 05/56. If you have any concerns about the ethics of this research, please contact Dr John G O’Neill, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: PN telephone 06 350 5799 x 8635, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz”.*

Yours sincerely

Dr John G O’Neill, Chair
Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North

cc Dr Mary Nash & Professor Robyn Munford
School of Sociology, Social Policy & Social Work
PN371

Appendix Two



child, youth
and family

A service of the Ministry of Social Development

11 December 2006

Shannon Pakura
14 Saunders Close
Whitby

Dear Shannon,

What are the Motivating Factors for New Zealand's Statutory Workers to remain in the job that they do? 'What gets them up every morning?'

Thank you for submitting an application to the Research Access Committee (RAC). Your application was discussed at the RAC meeting on 6 December 2006, and I am pleased to advise that the RAC has approved your application in principle, subject to the conditions below. Meeting these conditions does imply further work before you can start your research. RAC members wondered whether therefore you might request an extension to the dissertation deadline to enable you to do this more comfortably. We would happily support your request, and Raewyn Good has offered to contact your supervisor to assist in this regard if necessary.

The conditions of access are:

1. The sampling method used to recruit participants will need to reflect your position as a private, independent researcher, separate from your previous role at CYF. This means that you will need to recruit current staff participants directly, rather than identifying potential participants through CYF People and Capability.
2. Your role as researcher also needs to be further emphasised in the information sheets provided to participants. Specifically, you need to provide your private contact details and use Massey University letterhead for the information sheets;
3. You also need to explicitly state on the information sheets that no information from the study will be kept in CYF or the Social Workers Registration Board files, and participants' responses will not impact on their professional lives in any way. You should note that the only exception to this would be if unsafe practices were identified in the course of the interviews.
4. All interviews must be conducted at neutral premises and not at CYF offices.
5. Feedback in the form of a results summary sheet should be made available to participants, and this option included on the consent form.
6. Considering the demands on staff at DRM sites, participants should not be recruited from these sites.
7. More information is needed regarding cultural considerations – you need to specify who the cultural advisers will be.

National Office

Level 4, Bowen State Building
Bowen Street
PO Box 2620
Wellington New Zealand

"Safe children in strong families and responsive communities"

Child, Youth and Family Service of MSD | Te Tari Awhina I te Tamaiti, te Rangatahi, tae atu ki te Whanau 146

You will need to write to us (via email is fine) saying that you have either taken the necessary action to meet our conditions or commit to so doing so at the appropriate time.

In addition to the conditions outlined above that relate to your specific research, all research access applicants must also comply with the following standard conditions:

Deed of Confidentiality

Access to CYF information is contingent on you, as a private researcher, signing the attached *Deed of Confidentiality* as an acceptance of the way in which information held by the Agency will be used by you. It also reflects the seriousness of any breach of the information privacy principles contained within the Privacy Act 1993.

Police Checks

All researchers must have their status checked by Police, but given your recent employment status this condition will be taken as met.

Draft

You have agreed to send a penultimate draft of your report to the Chairperson of Child, Youth and Family Research Access Committee at National Office, Wellington. This enables the RAC to review the draft to ensure that legal, ethical and matters-of-fact are adequately addressed.

Final Report

You have agreed to send a copy of your final report to the Chairperson of Child, Youth and Family Research Access Committee at National Office, Wellington.

During their discussions, the Committee also raised a number of suggestions in relation to your research, which you may wish to take into account. Please note that these are only suggestions and not requirements or conditions for approval.

- Graduate social workers could be included in the sample to gauge the expectations of social workers starting out. This could provide a basis for further research in the future.
- Research that has recently been through the research access process may be relevant to your topic. The thesis is currently being written by an Auckland University student Debra McEwan and is entitled "Social Workers on the move - British trained Social Workers' expectations of Social Work Practice in the Department of Children, Youth and Family Service (CYFs)"
- If you had any questions regarding methodology, Jenny Holdt indicated she was happy to be of assistance.

Good luck with your research. Please contact me with any queries.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Ross
Chairperson
Research Access Committee

National Office
Level 4, Bowen State Building
Bowen Street
PO Box 2620
Wellington New Zealand



child, youth
and family

A service of the Ministry of Social Development

18 April 2007

Shannon Pakura
14 Saunders Close
Whitby

Dear Shannon,

Thank you for your letter of 24 March 2007 accepting the research access conditions outlined in our letter to you of 11 December 2006.

This letter is to formally confirm that you have met the conditions for approval set out by the CYF Research Access Committee for the research access you requested to progress your research entitled "**What are the Motivating Factors for New Zealand's Statutory Workers to remain in the job that they do? 'What gets them up every morning?'**". We also confirm receipt of your Deed of Confidentiality.

Good luck with your research. Please contact me with any queries.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Ross
Chairperson
Research Access Committee

National Office
Level 4, Bowen State Building
Bowen Street
PO Box 2620
Wellington New Zealand

Appendix Three



01 September 2005

To all social workers

What are the motivating factors for a statutory social worker to remain in the job they do?

'What gets them up every morning?'

INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

I am working on the above MSW thesis research project. I am employed by the Department of Child Youth and Family. I am a senior manager in the Department of Child Youth and Family. My name is Shannon Pakura.

I will be examining the key motivating factors that support statutory social workers to continue to do the job they do and to understand the drivers that inspires them to come to work every day.

My supervisors for this thesis are Dr Mary Nash and Professor Robyn Munford.

Participant Recruitment

I am inviting you to be a research participant. I will be conducting individual interviews with four distinct groups of social workers

- Statutory social workers who have more than 10 experience
- Statutory social workers who have more 5 years experience and less than 10 years experience
- Clinical social work leaders who have had 3 years or more experience in a leadership role in the statutory environment
- Statutory social workers who have retired and who have had 5 or more years experience in statutory social work

The method used to obtain names of participants for the research has been two fold. Firstly, I am advertising for respondents who are retired social workers. For social work staff who are currently employed by Child Youth and Family and are interested in taking part in this study and who meet the one criterion above please make direct contact with the researcher or. My contact details are at on Page 3 of this Information Sheet. I am seeking approximately thirteen participants for the project.

- My role in Child Youth and Family is General Manager – Service Development. I am aware of the status of my role and the dilemma this may present for prospective participants. In recognising this fact the Chief Social Worker has agreed that should you feel uncomfortable or pressured in any way to address concerns or issues with the researcher. I do not foresee any discomfort for the participants.

Project Procedures

The data gathered may be used to analyse, critique and inform the recruitment, retention and supportive requirements of statutory social workers. The data will form a significant part of this thesis project and contribute to the conclusions reached as a result of this study.

The data will be stored by the researcher for 5 years.

Participant involvement

The individual interviews will take approximately 2 hours. These interviews will be conducted at venues agreeable to the participant. The focus group may take up to 2.5 hours. The venue for the focus group is negotiable.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study anytime prior to the interview taking place
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- to receive a summary of the project findings when it is concluded. The researcher will take responsibility to send the summary to you.
- I also understand that I have the right to ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.
- should you feels uncomfortable or pressured the Chief Social Worker has agreed to address this issue with the researcher

Unsafe Practice or Illegal Practices

If the researcher is confronted by what appears to be unsafe practice, the researcher will inform you of that view. The researcher will discuss the concerns with the research supervisors and an agreed way forward will be sought. You will be party to the discussion and kept fully informed of the decision made to address the researchers concerns.

Support Processes

Should you require support to deal with any concerns that result from this project, my supervisors will be able to assist you or direct you where you can access services.

Project Contacts

My contact details are:
shannon.pakura@xtra.co.nz
14 Saunders Close
Whitby
Porirua
Mobile: 0275341254
DDI: 04 919132

My supervisors' details are:

Dr Mary Nash M.Nash@massey.ac.nz
Prof Robyn Munford. r.munford@massey.ac.nz

Committee Approval Statement

“This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, Palmerston North Application 05/56. If you have any concerns about the ethics of this research, please contact Dr John G O’Neill, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: PN telephone 06 350 5799 x 8635, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz”.

Yours sincerely

Shannon Pakura

Appendix Four



Questions for Interviewees

1. How long have you been in the role of statutory social worker?

2. What are the key aspects for you in the role - what is important to you?

3. What were you hoping to achieve in the role when you started work for CYF?
 - i. What are the three or four positive aspects of the role that attracted you to this work?
 - ii. What are the three or four negative aspects that you considered when you were thinking about applying for the role?
 - iii. Reflecting on those things, what has been your experience?
 - iv. Having been in the role a number of years what has been your goal and your dream?

4. What frustrates or are distracters or disincentives for you?

5. What are the professional support systems that need development and require change or refinement?

6. What are the support systems that provide you with confidence to continue to remain in the role at CYF?

7. What do you believe you need to have within your environment to continue to sustain you in your profession and operating in the statutory environment?
8. If you could change one thing right now which you believe would best support social workers in this role, what would that be?
9. What do you believe our (NZ) society desires from a statutory child protection social worker? Is it achievable and is it reasonable?
10. You're an [experienced] retired social worker. You have the opportunity to talk to a group of key employers of social workers. What advice would you offer on the ideal conditions for a social worker to want to stay and continue to operate in this role?
11. What does success look like for you [personally] in your role?
 - How was/is success celebrated
 - What would you like the celebration to have been
12. What does organisational success look like for you in your role?
 - How is that success celebrated
 - How would you like that success to be celebrated