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“Our voice needs to be heard”

The Impact of Contract Changes on Clients of Child and Family Services

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

Caregivers of children balance unique complexities, dealing with their own personal commitments while often engaging with multiple agencies providing services to them and the children in their care. Child and family services that support caregivers and children are funded and contracted by the State through a process known as procurement where the State awards funding contracts to different community agencies. These funding contracts are susceptible to changes which can have profound impacts on caregivers' lives. Contract changes occur when the State, holding decision-making power over the contract, makes contract alterations or funds another community agency for the contracted service. This qualitative-exploratory study aimed to explore how caregiver clients of State-funded community child and family services are impacted when contracts change resulting in a change of service for the client.

This research found that clients' needs were not accurately addressed or met within current procurement practice; communication and support for clients was lost during times of contract change; and there was a lack of available opportunity for clients to engage in a meaningful way with contract decision-making. These experiences resulted from mechanisms of neoliberalism, agency accountability to the State, and the current procurement approach which significantly impacted clients' experiences. The findings highlighted that clients significantly impacted by contract changes are fully aware of this impact but felt their voices were ignored, keeping any contract decision-making out of their control. Further research exploring clients' exclusion from decision-making and feedback provision would provide deeper insight into the systemic elements that inhibit clients sharing their voice when they have concerns about the support they receive. Finally, further research with a larger sample size would be of great benefit as this would provide a fuller picture of how contract changes impact on clients' experiences of services.

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Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	1
Rationale	1
Research Aims	2
Study Design.....	3
Researcher Positioning.....	3
Background to the topic	3
Definitions of Key Terms	5
Structure of Report.....	6
Chapter Summary	7
Chapter Two: Procurement Theory & Policy in New Zealand.....	8
Using Procurement within Social Services	9
Theories of Procurement.....	10
Agency Theory.....	10
Partnership & Stewardship Theory	11
Complexity Theory	13
The History of Procurement Policy Within Social Services in New Zealand	15
Child Protection Procurement Policy within New Zealand	18
Chapter Summary	21
Chapter Three: When Contracts Change	22
Neoliberalism & Contract Changes	23
Procurement Theory & Contract Changes	24
Community Agencies & Contract Changes	24
Accountability.....	25
Interagency Relationships.....	26
Client Voices.....	26
Chapter Summary	27
Chapter Four: Methodology and Method.....	29
Theoretical Positioning	29
Critical realism.....	30
Qualitative Research	31
Goals of the Study.....	32
Data Collection	32
Stage One: Contacting Community Agencies.....	32

Sampling Strategy	33
Stage Two – Process A: Client Participant Recruitment	33
Stage Two – Process B: Professional Participant Recruitment.....	34
Semi-Structured Interviews	35
Thematic Analysis	35
Ethical Considerations	37
Limitations of the Study.....	39
Chapter Summary	39
Chapter Five: Findings.....	40
Participants.....	40
The Complexities of Caregiving.....	42
The Current Funding Model	43
Experiencing Contract Change	44
Agency Communication with Caregivers	45
The Importance of the Caregiver-Practitioner Relationship	48
Caregiver Proactivity When Contracts Change	50
Providing Feedback to Agencies.....	52
Chapter Summary	53
Chapter Six: Discussion.....	54
Defining the causal mechanisms.....	54
The State’s Inability to Contract Complexity	55
Neoliberal Contracting Priorities	56
Interagency Dynamics.....	56
Self-Advocacy.....	58
Client Engagement in a Neoliberal Context	59
Accountability to Clients	59
Client-Practitioner Relationship Instability.....	60
Systemic Exclusion of Client Voices.....	62
Chapter Summary	63
Chapter Seven – Conclusion	64
Study Design.....	64
Key Findings.....	65
Neoliberal procurement models underestimate clients’ complex needs	65
Accountability structures limit client engagement.....	67
Community agencies appear unreliable due to contract prioritisation.....	67
Clients self-advocate within a neoliberal accountability context.....	68

Client voices are necessary in procurement	69
Implications.....	70
Limitations	70
Recommendations.....	71
Further Research	72
Conclusion	72
References	73
Appendix A: Letter to Organisations	86
Appendix B: Process A Information Sheet.....	87
Appendix C: Process A Advertisement.....	89
Appendix D: Process B Advertisement	90
Appendix E: Process B Information Sheet	91
Appendix F: Consent Form.....	93
Appendix G: Full Ethics Approval Letter	94
Appendix H: Process A - Email to Community Agencies	95
Appendix I: Process B – Email to Community Agencies.....	96
Appendix J: Process B – Interview Schedule	97
Appendix K: Process A – Interview Schedule.....	100

Chapter One: Introduction

Caregivers of children play a valuable and complex role, requiring caregivers to often advocate for support and engage with multiple government and community agencies. Since the 1980s, community agencies (also known as Non-Government Organisations) in New Zealand have increasingly operated based on contracted funding from the State (Boston, 1996). This approach is known as procurement, where the State grants service delivery contracts, defined by set funding and outcome expectations, to community agencies (Coffey, 2018). Underpinned by the influence of neoliberalism, which emphasises limited State intervention and responsible government fiscal spending, contracting in the social sector has become driven by performance measures and accountability requirements which are placed on community agencies delivering social services (Grey et al., 2015; Stanley-Clarke, 2015). This dynamic results in a two-fold predicament which adversely impacts on caregiver clients. Firstly, community agencies begin to act in ways which prioritise meeting contract requirements in lieu of supporting clients' needs, such as the diminished power of advocacy on behalf of clients (Renau, 2021). Secondly, the State begins to assess contract suitability in order to achieve the best outcomes and contract value by reviewing contracted community agencies and either amending contract funding and/or specifications, or removing contracts from community agencies altogether (Cordery, 2012a, 2012b). While there is ongoing discourse pertaining to how the contracting environment impacts on professional practice (Price & Kelly, 2021) and there is also commentary that suggests clients should have a voice in contracting processes (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2015), scant attention is given to the ways clients are impacted when support is amended or lost due to a contract decision made by the State (Butler et al., 2017). This research seeks to understand how the current neoliberal procurement environment impacts caregiver clients when they experience a contract change whilst receiving child and family services.

This chapter introduces the research. It identifies the rationale and research aims of this study, followed by a contextual layout of how the practice of procurement and neoliberalism have intermingled to result in the current contracting arrangement New Zealand community agencies face. The key study terms are then identified, ending with the structure of the report.

Rationale

In their 2015 report, the New Zealand Productivity Commission (2015) identified the absence of stakeholder voices in contract decision-making. Contract decision-making is guided by procurement, the contracting approach the State undertakes when outsourcing services to community agencies

(Coffey, 2018). Procurement policy in New Zealand since the 1980s has been connected to neoliberal ideas of competition and performance accountability.¹ Despite neoliberal influence, there has been a shift towards the State and community agencies sharing more responsibility and power with the recognition that complex social needs cannot be easily defined within contracting. However, community agency accountability to the State for contract outcomes remains a tension point for the State-community agency relationship (Grey & Sedgwick, 2015).

The absence of client input in the procurement decision-making process is disproportionate to the impact clients experience when contracts change (Butler et al., 2017). As will be explored in Chapter Three, clients' experiences of change span several domains, ranging from the client-practitioner relationship to dealing with interagency dynamics. While the practitioner experience of contract changes has been documented (Coffey, 2018; Peat & Costley, 2001; Price & Kelly, 2021), there is minimal literature available on how clients experience contract changes (Butler et al., 2017). This is particularly pertinent regarding caregiver clients, who often engage with services voluntarily due to caring for non-biological children and tend to be confronted with multiple agencies at any given point in time. Due to the complexity of caregiving, agency engagement can cause additional stress for caregivers when support does change (Blythe et al., 2014; Randle et al., 2017). This complicates already complex circumstances for caregiver clients. This study seeks to expand on the existing contracting literature by exploring caregiver clients' experiences of contract changes.

Research Aims

The aim of this research is to explore how caregiver clients of State-funded community child and family services are impacted when contracts change resulting in a change of service for the client. The aims of this study were to:

- Explore the relational experiences of social service contracting between professionals and clients
- Explore how these contract changes impact client perception and reception of services
- Discuss how client perspectives could be integrated into policy when contract changes occur

¹ The connection between neoliberalism and procurement policy is explored later in this chapter and covered extensively in Chapter Two.

Study Design

This study followed a qualitative-exploratory approach by exploring caregiver clients' experiences of contract changes in order to gain better insight into how clients are impacted by these changes (Hunter et al., 2019). As a qualitative study, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with caregivers who were clients of children protection agencies. The purpose of the interviews was to understand their views on the current contracting environment and to unpack their experiences of contract changes. Critical realism formed the theoretical framework for this research. Critical realism permits the researcher to explore causal mechanisms, systemic structures that shape people's experiences of situations, which are understood through individual experience and context (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). As caregivers experience complex circumstances when caring for children, it is important to understand their perception of events which impact on the support they receive. Participants' experiences were then explored using thematic analysis to identify how causal mechanisms both impact clients' experiences and are, in turn, experienced by clients (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018).²

Researcher Positioning

The appetite for this research topic culminated from a series of personal interests and professional experiences. My fascination with the topic of contracts emerged from personal views about the political economy's influence on people's lives coupled with the sober question of how one could be a social worker in a contract-based neoliberal world. Having been both a statutory and community social worker, I also have had the opportunity to engage with clients who previously experienced contracted services that have changed, permitting the brief opportunity to hear their stories in different professional settings. Their accounts bothered me deeply due to the complex needs caregivers often face when supporting children in their care and engaging with agencies so they could receive support. This left me wondering who was listening to caregivers' concerns when contracts changed, and if no one was, why not? This fostered a curiosity about the systemic factors which dictate the way social services are delivered in a contracting environment, considering both the overt and subtle impacts these factors can have on the very people most in need of support.

Background to the topic

Procurement is about community agencies delivering services on behalf of the State, often taking the form of contracts which dictate the terms of the services the State expects community agencies to deliver and what accountability measures to use (Coffey, 2018). The purpose of these expectations and

² The research methodology and method are discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

requirements is to assist the State with determining if a contract is being fulfilled or not (Allen, 2021). The State adopts this procurement approach because it is both cost-effective and enables clients to receive services from agencies that are local to them, rather than from the State (Lindberg & Nordin, 2008). For clients of services, this procurement method means that though community agencies are directly delivering services, agencies still become externally accountable to the State for their actions, resulting in service delivery that may not best suit clients themselves if the contract does not match clients' needs (Keevers et al., 2012; Sawyers, 2016). Consequently, community agencies are perceived by clients and the broader populace as an extension of the State itself (Butler et al., 2017; Grey & Sedgwick, 2015; Joy, 1996; Keevers et al., 2012; Kuruvila, 2017; Macfarlane, 2017; Schwartz, 2005). Compounding this dynamic, the State acts and alters contracts to improve accountability further adversely affecting clients (Cordery, 2012a; Levine, 2009). Despite this impact on clients, client voices are often absent from procurement decision-making (Butler et al., 2017).

Underpinning contracting practice, neoliberalism has been influential in how procurement has developed as it has fundamentally led to a shift in responsibility towards community agencies while limiting the autonomy of agencies to meet the needs of their communities (Boston et al., 1991). The way the State approaches procurement is significant because ideas, such as neoliberalism, impact on the very nature of the support clients receive from contracted community agencies. Since Te Tiriti O Waitangi in 1840, the State and the social sector have always interacted in some fashion (Boston, 1996; Tennant, 2007). The practice of procuring community services to fulfil what were previously public duties has largely been attributed to the rise of neoliberalism in both global and New Zealand politics (Aimers & Walker, 2016; Boston, 1996; Coffey, 2018; Grey & Sedgwick, 2015; Kramer, 1994; Levine, 2009; O'Brien, 2016; Price & Kelly, 2021). Both international and New Zealand research comment on the complex relationship formed between the State and the social sector as a result of neoliberalism, which forms the context of social service procurement as it exists today (Came et al., 2017; Coffey, 2018; Cordery, 2012a, 2012b, 2017; Grey & Sedgwick, 2015; Johnston & Romzek, 2008; Joy, 1996; Levine, 2009; O'Brien, 2016; Peat & Costley, 2001; Renau, 2021; Smith & Lipsky, 1993).

Neoliberal ideology began to influence New Zealand government thinking in the 1980s with an aim of reducing the size of State services and spending, thus changing social service delivery (Coffey, 2018).³ An example of these changes is seen in the child protection space which sought to balance State responsibility for children whilst reducing expenditure.⁴ As a result of these neoliberal changes, two aims began to underpin the idea of procurement when the State contracted out services: quality and

³ The broader context and rise of neoliberalism are discussed in further detail in Chapter Two.

⁴ The history of child protection procurement is discussed in further detail in Chapter Two.

efficiency (Allen, 2021; Cohen, 2001; Harland et al., 2021; Lamothe, 2015; Tadelis, 2012). The notion of quality is built on the idea that delivery of services can better be achieved through a contracted community agency because of the agency’s proximity to its own communities and clients (Lindberg & Nordin, 2008) in contrast to the State which is centralised and distanced from communities (Cordery, 2012b). The second tenet of procurement states that efficiency is achieved in the form of written contracts that community agencies must follow to ensure not only quality of delivery but also that use of funding and resources are maximised as much as possible without increasing cost (Lindberg & Nordin, 2008; Pelkonen & Valovirta, 2015). To achieve these aims, economic principles are applied to the social service procurement process whereby contracts are awarded to community agencies based on a range of criteria, such as lowest cost to deliver services (Tadelis, 2012). This is known as marketisation, where the decision about which community agency will deliver contracts is dependent on competition between agencies to obtain select contracts from the State. While the State adoption of contract marketisation seeks to improve efficiency and financial accountability of contracts, client voices in contract decision-making are absent despite the adverse impact clients experience when change occurs (Butler et al., 2017; Levine, 2009). These voices are important in light of the important role caregiver clients provide alongside the stressors they experience relationally with agencies and their services (Blythe et al., 2014; Randle et al., 2017). Chapter Two identifies the ideologies and procurement practices which culminated in contracting processes which see clients as ignored stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms are defined to ensure consistency of understanding across the report:

Child and family services	Services provided by either a community agency or a government department which is targeted at children or families.
Clients	Adult caregivers in receipt of contracted social service support.
Community Agency	An organisation that operates separately from government agencies but may still receive government funding via contracts (often also known as a Non-Government Organisation). The term ‘Community Agency’ is utilised in this research to reflect the obligations these agencies have to their communities and the context in which these agencies operate.

Contract	An agreement between a community agency and the State whereby the agency is provided funding by the State to outwork specified services within the community.
Contract change	When the State amends community agency contract funding, contract specifications, or removes contracts from community agencies altogether.
Oranga Tamariki	The statutory child protection agency in New Zealand, previously known as Child, Youth, and Family.
Practitioner	An employed professional working for a community agency whose job is to support clients with services provided by the agency.
Procurement	The systematic approach adopted by the State when contracting out services to community agencies.
Social sector	The overarching group of community agencies which deliver social services and exist independent of government agencies but may be reliant on contracts.
The State	The New Zealand Government.

Structure of Report

This thesis consists of seven chapters, including the introductory chapter. The second chapter sets the neoliberal context in which procurement occurs within the public sector, firstly from a theoretical-historical perspective, then practically within Aotearoa New Zealand with regard given to the context of child protection procurement. The third chapter expands on this context by identifying how neoliberal ideas influence changes in contracts for community agencies and the impact these changes have on

agencies and clients. The fourth chapter addresses the methodology and method of the research by discussing the adopted critical realist lens, the chosen method of semi-structured interviews, and the thematic analytical approach taken when exploring the data. The fifth chapter provides the research findings, based on common themes reflected in the interviews. Chapter six uses a critical realist framework to analyse the results, identifying the key causal mechanisms which impact clients' voices and perspectives within community agency contracting. The final chapter details the key findings of the research along with the implications, recommendations, and opportunities for further research.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the research which explores how clients are impacted when there is a change in the State-funded contracts granted to community agencies. The rationale, study aims, and study design were introduced which identify this research as being exploratory in nature, integrating critical realism as the adopted theoretical lens. The background to this research was discussed, introducing the concepts of neoliberalism and procurement, commenting on how they have become intertwined in service delivery. Common terms that will be utilised in this research were laid out and the structure of the report was explained. The following two chapters address the varying theoretical approaches to procurement and how this has historically shaped procurement practice within New Zealand.

Chapter Two: Procurement Theory & Policy in New Zealand

This research aims to explore how caregiver clients of State-funded community child and family services are impacted when contract changes result in a change of service for the client. This research explores how contract changes impact the client-practitioner relationship, the delivery of the service to the client, and how the client perceives the service. Chapter One introduced the research including the concept of procurement and the context of neoliberalism. The chapter discussed how procurement is an attempt by the State to deliver quality and efficient services. These questions have emerged within the context of neoliberalism, a school of political thought predicated on ideas of individual autonomy, residual welfare, and higher scrutiny of how public funding is spent. They have led to an increasingly restrictive environment on how community agencies can meet the needs of their communities. Expanding on these ideas, this chapter is the first of two chapters that explores the theoretical and practical implications of procurement policy within the social sector. These two chapters are separated to address the a). theoretical and socio-political context of procurement in New Zealand, and the b). impact on services and clients when contracts change based on existing procurement policy. Together they paint a picture of how procurement theory impacts all levels of decision-making including the services clients receive when contracts change.

As noted above, this chapter discusses procurement and how it relates to the contracting out of social services to the social sector. The different theories of procurement and their implications for the State-community agency relationship are discussed, including the indirect impact this relationship has on clients receiving services. These theoretical ideas are placed within the historical context of New Zealand procurement since the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s. The chapter ends with a consideration of the current procurement environment within child protection which has sought to adopt social procurement goals to support broader outcomes for clients while the State is still seeking to measure outcomes and hold community agencies accountable.

In locating literature for both this chapter and the next both international and New Zealand literature on the history of procurement theory was sourced. Databases, including Google Scholar and Massey Library, were utilised with search terms including: procurement, neoliberalism, contract change, client impact, and other similar terms. Delimiters were utilised to unpack the ideological backgrounds of different theories and to consider multiple ongoing perspectives and arguments central to different theories. Furthermore, while the focus of this thesis is on child and family services, research from across

the public sector is referenced due to the broad impact of procurement theory internationally since the 1980s.

Using Procurement within Social Services

As discussed in the previous chapter, the prevalence of efficiency and quality within a neoliberal approach vastly affects the way social services are viewed by the State. Inherent within the neoliberal context are different theoretical perspectives on State and community agencies interaction. These theories have significant influence over how public service contracts are handled and maintained by the State. Social procurement, though not easily defined, seeks to achieve intentional social outcomes through contracting using public resources (Furneaux & Barraket, 2014; Ruckstuhl et al., 2021; Wontner et al., 2020). In light of this, theories of procurement have wrestled with questions of how much autonomy community agencies should hold, what oversight the State should have, and how funding and outcomes are responsibly determined (Cribb, 2006b). Within international literature, these theories began to coagulate in the late 20th century as different governments wrestled with introducing economic ideas within the social sector while ensuring funding would be spent in a fiscally prudent manner (Cohen, 2001; Jacobs, 1997). When the State began to outsource responsibility to community agencies in the 1980s, competing ideas of accountability, service delivery, and State authority began to emerge (Cribb, 2006b; Stace & Cumming, 2006). While these issues have evolved, they have resulted in multiple theoretical iterations that have sought to balance these competing questions within different socio-political contexts. What is sometimes not present in discussions is how clients of services are impacted by these questions and the changes which result in fluctuating support for clients (Butler et al., 2017; Stace & Cumming, 2006).

The neoliberal approach to the delivery of services has not been without its concerns. Internationally, marketisation under neoliberalism has historically been the method used to achieve social outcomes within communities, such as in Europe and North America in the early 20th century (McCrudden, 2004). Consequently, there are multiple factors that influence how the contracting process is managed.⁵ For example, the desire by the State to seek cost-effective contracting options can result in policy that places heavier accountability restrictions on community agencies related to the services they can deliver and their reporting outcomes (Lindberg & Nordin, 2008). Additionally, these contract requirements are not fixed and can fluctuate based on how contracted agencies perform each year resulting in uncertainty for community agencies regarding State contract expectations (Cordery, 2012b). As a result, international literature has historically raised concerns about how procurement can best approach solutions to social

⁵ Such as writing the contract, accountability measures, and State-community agency communication.

problems (Cohen, 2001; Domberger & Jensen, 1997; Thai, 2001). For example, contract changes have ramifications for clients because the decisions that the State makes influences the service clients end up receiving from community agencies (Keevers et al., 2012; Mosley, 2012). When change occurs in how community agencies are required to report their outcomes or what services they are contracted to provide, the flow-on effect changes the type of support clients end up receiving (Lamothe, 2015; Moore, 2019). The way the State has made these sorts of decisions has changed over time as will be explored in the next section.

Theories of Procurement

In the previous chapter, the nature of procurement was introduced by addressing the core ideas of quality and efficiency of service. Rooted in these tenets is a history of interpreting the State-community agency relationship which has changed over time as it sought to balance competing interests and divergent ideas on how services should be delivered. Since the 1980s in New Zealand, various theoretical understandings have dominated the State's approach to engaging with and funding contracted community agencies (Coffey, 2018). The three dominant theories have been agency theory, partnership & stewardship, and complexity theory. As will be discussed below, each of these theories represents shifts in the State's thinking about service delivery in a contractual setting and how State-community agency dynamics should operate. This section contextualises the three theories by exploring their respective influences on procurement policy within New Zealand. As these theories are addressed, they reflect how power and decision-making between the State and community agencies has been a fixed point of debate with minimal consideration given to clients' voices or clients' needs.

Agency Theory

Agency theory, largely influenced by the ideas of neoliberalism, is predicated on the notion that community agencies are self-interested with the intent of maximising their individual goals (Grey & Sedgwick, 2015; Lamothe, 2015; Levine, 2009; Stace & Cumming, 2006). Developed by Jensen and Meckling (1976), agency theory emerged within the context of economics concerning how individuals interact with one another within a business structure which is premised on autonomy and self-interest. Agency theory has been applied by the State within these contexts to perceive how incentives between individuals and groups influence one another when they each express their autonomy. Agency theory logic has been extended to the social sector as a way of understanding how the State contracts out services to agencies while maintaining control over the funding that is bound by the contract (McCue & Prier, 2008).

A belief of agency theory is that motivation for community agencies to fulfil contractual duties to the State is ensured through the incentive of rewarded contracts (Cribb, 2006b). An exacerbating complication in agency theory is the tensions that can arise within the State-community agency relationship, such as a misalignment of goals and an imbalance of knowledge between the parties (Cribb, 2006b; Peat & Costley, 2001). Inherent in agency theory is the acknowledgement that expertise imbalance exists and action must be taken by the State to ensure it maintains control over service delivery (McCue & Prier, 2008). For example, an historical concern is that set service contracts do not align with the goals of community agencies (Butler et al., 2017; Cohen, 2001; Lindberg & Nordin, 2008; Oakden et al., 2021; Peat & Costley, 2001). Tensions arise when the imbalance of knowledge leads to community agencies understanding the client base whilst the State sets the outcomes and funding, resulting in community agencies either not adhering to contracts or providing services that are not in line with their understanding of their communities (Aimers & Walker, 2008b; Joy, 1996; Levine, 2009; Onyx et al., 2010; Peat & Costley, 2001; Washington et al., 2009).

Agency theory's application in social service procurement results in clients being adversely impacted through indirect means due to contract changes which impact service delivery. When community agencies are viewed by the State as self-interested, thus requiring monitoring, contracts tend to be limited in their scope and do not adequately meet the complex needs that clients have (Keevers et al., 2012; Levine, 2009). The application of agency theory also leads to contract changes either in how community agencies can deliver services or changes in the community agencies altogether, resulting in a loss of client-practitioner relationships and consistency of service delivery (ANGOA, 2012; Cordery, 2012a; Levine, 2009; Washington et al., 2009). In response, community agencies mould behaviour to meet contractual requirements even when agencies believe the contractual requirements run contrary to the needs of the community (Mosley, 2012). Agencies also run the risk of either failing to meet the needs of their clients or losing their contracts with the State due to non-delivery of contracted services by going outside the bounds of what the contract stipulates. This approach has been persistent in New Zealand since the 1980s. While the State has wrestled with socio-political changes leading to multiple iterations of procurement practice, overarching theoretical premises have driven a taut State-community agency relationship predicated on contracting requirements and accountability measures (Coffey, 2018). This practice has led to a model fixated on State expectations of community agencies with minimal regard for clients' needs.

Partnership & Stewardship Theory

Responding to the issues of agency theory, partnership discourse and ideology sought to address the power imbalances that emerged as the State viewed community agencies as self-interested agents

(Dicke & Ott, 2002; Rouault & Albertini, 2022). One model that surfaced in response painted agencies as stewards of public services, seeking not their own self-interest but co-operation with the State and the upholding of mutual goals (Cribb, 2006a, 2006b; Schillemans & Bjurstrøm, 2020). In contrast to agency theory, which emphasises State-community agency tensions due to the imbalance of expertise, stewardship theory suggest that agencies will prioritise State co-operation over breaches of contract when goals diverge, including agency neglect of clients in favour of State contract goals (Aimers & Walker, 2008b; Cribb, 2006b). International and New Zealand literature reflect a gravitation towards partnership ideas and stewardship theory, identifying it as a recommended model for better State-community agency interactions as well as internal agency dialogue to encourage better partnership between parties (Butler et al., 2017; Grey et al., 2015; Keay, 2017; Munford & Sanders, 2001; Sanders et al., 2008; Schillemans & Bjurstrøm, 2020; Schmid, 2003; Torfing & Bentzen, 2020). For example, recommendations reflected the acknowledgement within the social sector that a shift towards viewing the State-community agency relationship as a partnership of mutual goals would not only benefit the State and community agencies but also the communities receiving contracted support. As a result, where agency theory painted community agencies as self-interested, requiring monitoring and motivation in the form of State contracts, stewardship theory sought to challenge this narrative.

Adding complexity to the discourse, it has been challenged whether partnership or agency discourse is best suited to improve agency performance when contracted by the State (Cribb, 2006a; Dicke & Ott, 2002; Keay, 2017; Rouault & Albertini, 2022; Schillemans & Bjurstrøm, 2020; Torfing & Bentzen, 2020). When theorists first introduced stewardship theory in the early 1990s, academics questioned whether the notions of partnership proposed by stewardship theory could be applied within a procurement setting based on contracts and funding (Cribb, 2006a; Dicke & Ott, 2002; Torfing & Bentzen, 2020). Since its development, stewardship theory has been employed in both community and corporate discourse. An important consideration in this development is the notion of trust between parties in a contract setting whereby co-operation is built on mutual goals, relying less on accountability measures found in agency theory (Dicke & Ott, 2002; Rouault & Albertini, 2022; Scott & Merton, 2021, 8 July). For a partnership to be formed, rather than a relationship built on accountability measures, trust must be built between the supplier (the State) and the buyer (community agencies). As trust is intangible to measure and substitutes the evidence that can easily be provided by performance measures, stewardship theory is not easily put into practice due to its lack of emphasis on measurable accountability (Cribb, 2006b; Rouault & Albertini, 2022).

The State's hesitance to adopt stewardship theory is due to the broader context that has developed within neoliberal discourse where procurement decisions are treated with scepticism by the State if

accountability checks cannot be put in place (Coffey, 2018). As other procurement issues permeate contracting, such as the questions of contract length, resourcing, and misalignment of goals between the State and agencies, the ability to establish trust between the State and community agencies within a stewardship model becomes untenable in the face of the existing contracting issues caused by the influence of neoliberalism (Boulton et al., 2018; Came et al., 2017; Coffey, 2018; Moore, 2019; Oakden et al., 2021).

What partnership discourse and stewardship theory highlight is the desire to see better co-operation between the State and community agencies by reframing the priorities and goals of each party (Aimers & Walker, 2008b; Cribb, 2006a; Torfing & Bentzen, 2020). What is required by a stewardship approach is a new lens built on trust unburdened by the accountability measures which arose due to agency theory and neoliberal ideas of contracting (Torfing & Bentzen, 2020). Application of stewardship theory would instead allow for greater flexibility for clients in engaging with agencies as agencies would be permitted by the State to act flexibly, contrasting agency theory's strict accountability and contracting approach (Aimers & Walker, 2008b; Butler et al., 2017). Due to the existing reliance on accountability within the contracting space, stewardship theory struggled to thoroughly influence procurement practices that would have better served clients receiving support from community agencies (Aimers & Walker, 2008b; Dicke & Ott, 2002).

Complexity Theory

Diverging from the focus on the State-community agency relationship, a third approach that emerged contemporaneously to stewardship theory rooted itself in seeking to understand the relationship within complex social and political systems (Anderson, 1999; Eppel & Karacaoglu, 2017; Eppel & Rhodes, 2018; Oakden et al., 2021; Teisman & Klijn, 2008). Complexity theory has its origins within natural scientific study, as opposed to economics, with the understanding that events that are individually simple can result in complex outcomes and behaviour (Byrne, 1998). Due to the vast scope and applicability of complexity theory, theoretical definitions are contested (Eppel & Karacaoglu, 2017; Oakden et al., 2021). Within social science, complexity theory embraces the dual tenets that complexity is an independent issue requiring definition separate from its context, while also referring to the impact of uncertainty in decision-making (Oakden et al., 2021). In practice, this means that consideration must be given to how complexity is understood within a situation, in addition to how a situation changes due to the presence of complex factors. As will be explored in the following paragraphs, the implications of this paradigm impact on how clients' needs can be accurately captured in contracts that are bound by performance and accountability measures.

Within procurement theory, complexity theory explores the process of attempting to establish contracts that address the complex social issues clients face whilst also upholding traditional procurement principles of accountability and funding (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2015). Because complexity theory requires both an understanding of complexity within a situation while also considering how a situation is impacted by complex dynamics, solutions within procurement theory begin to return to stewardship or agency principles. For example, complexity theory within procurement must first consider the individual goals, priorities, and limitations of both the State and community agencies. Since these need to be accounted for in decision-making, the speed at which policy can develop is significantly reduced due to the multiple internal interests, goals, and priorities in any decision (Butcher, 2014; Cohen et al., 1972; Elson, 2009; Elson & Hall, 2016; Teisman & Klijn, 2008). Complexity becomes central to the conversation when there are competing goals within the State or community agencies themselves. Competition can result in policy stagnation and decisions which lead to the exclusion of divergent perspectives (Boon et al., 2017; Cohen et al., 1972; Lindblom, 1959). Where policy stagnation occurs, policy decisions become more estranged from their intended goals due to the internal competing interest which must be addressed before external groups to the process, such as clients, are taken into account (Fyfe et al., 2009). Since client perspectives historically sit outside contract decision-making, the application of these principles means that their perspectives are less likely to be considered in contract decisions.

Once the nature of complexity within procurement has been addressed and explored, it must also consider how these factors impact on the context of the State-community agency relationship and the obstacle of quantifying client needs within a written contract. Complexity theory seeks to address pitfalls faced by agency and stewardship theory alike by placing clients at the centre of contract decision-making. In order for complex client needs to be adequately defined within a contract, there first must be a convergence of goals and interests between the State and community agencies (Oakden et al., 2021). If this occurred and competing internal interests were resolved, limitations would still be imposed by partnership theory as discussed in the previous section. This is because the very nature of the State-community agency relationship within the procurement context requires performance measures because of the likelihood of goal misalignment and competing interests. These issues culminate in the reality that defining how to meet complex needs for clients becomes increasingly difficult as more factors are taken into account (Boston, 1996; Stace & Cumming, 2006). As the State requires more contract measures, decision-making becomes more centralised within the State, increasing the chance of both the State and the community agencies being disadvantaged by the arrangement due to the increased likelihood of perspectives being excluded from decision-making

(Brown et al., 2016). As an implication for clients, theory which seeks to account for the complexity of their needs can inadvertently lead to their perspectives being excluded in the process. Within New Zealand, the Sixth Labour Government (2017-2023) had sought to alleviate these concerns further by providing more autonomy for community agencies. How this came about will be considered further in the following sections.

In summary, theories that have developed within the procurement processes have impacted the State-community agency relationship in a variety of ways. This ranges firstly from the agency discourse of conflicting goals and accountability measures, to a picture of the State and agencies in partnership to fulfil mutual goals, and lastly with the notion that community agencies require autonomy from the State to adequately meet the complex needs of their communities. These theories not only impact the State-community agency relationship but also how clients are perceived by the State and community agencies alike. As theory has developed within procurement practice, more consideration is given not only to the complexity of needs which clients face, requiring dynamic and flexible service delivery but also the importance of client perspectives in decision-making when it comes to contracts and delivery of services. Where procurement practice neglects client perspectives, focusing on the State-community agency relationship only, clients' needs are overlooked by contract specifications and accountability requirements. In the remaining historical considerations of this chapter, these vying issues will be addressed within the socio-political context of New Zealand with attention given to how the treatment of community agencies by the State has fluctuated.

The History of Procurement Policy Within Social Services in New Zealand

Since the influence of neoliberalism began in the 1980s, the three aforementioned theoretical approaches to contracting have been applied in various ways and across different settings within New Zealand (Coffey, 2018; Cribb, 2006b; Stace & Cumming, 2006). These changes have not been without their socio-political contexts which have influenced political thought on procurement practice. The changing contexts have developed shifting perspectives on how those in need are categorised and defined by the State, and what the optimal method of service delivery should be. It is also important to observe the changes in State behaviour, reflecting different procurement approaches by shifting between centralised and regionalised models. The following discussion gives attention to these issues within the unfolding political dynamics since the 1980s.

While neoliberal change began in New Zealand under the Fourth Labour Government (1984-1990) significant change in how the public viewed State financial accountability began to occur towards the

end of the decade. Following the enactment of the Public Finance Act 1989, the New Zealand Parliament implemented parameters which defined how the State ought to interact with the social sector whereby the State became increasingly accountable for government expenditure (Boston, 1996; Coffey, 2018; Jacobs, 1997; Tennant, 2007). While the State had always purchased services from the social sector, the 1980s saw a combination of pressures which resulted in a significant drive within the State towards contracting out services combined with an increase of accountability expectations regarding public funding (Boston, 1996; Jacobs, 1997). As a result, community agencies began operating as proxies for the role of the State in the 1990s during the Fourth National Government (1990-1999) resulting in significant reductions in funding for State services (Coffey, 2018; Cribb, 2006b; Kuruvila, 2017). These changes aligned with agency theory principles whereby performance measures were being used to fuel efficiency of service delivery within the social sector as the State began to reduce its role in delivering social services (Miah & Mia, 1997). For example, Miah and Mia (1997) identified that the decentralisation of the State led to an increase in the use of accounting measures within smaller government departments to improve performance at the local level. While they went on to find that accounting practices improved performance, other contemporaneous studies, commented on by Jacobs (1997) and Pomeroy (2007), demonstrated that accountability measures limited productivity, rather than enhancing it as had been hoped. These concerns have extended to sectors, such as health, where shorter contract cycles and greater community agency uncertainty become the focus, rather than improved productivity (Came, 2012; Came et al., 2018; Hay, 2000).

The introduction of social development (Third Way) politics from 1999 by the Fifth Labour Government (1999-2008), with a political turn to community engagement by the State, saw a growing emphasis on partnership between the State and the social sector (Aimers & Walker, 2008b; Cribb, 2006b; Heywood, 2002; Schwartz, 2005). These changes were driven by growing social sector sentiment that contracting models were siloed between government departments combined with a lack of procurement standardisation (Aimers & Walker, 2008b; Pomeroy, 2007; Stace & Cumming, 2006). The result was the development of the Funding for Outcomes programme, which sought to reduce bureaucratic public expenditure and strengthen good procurement practice across sectors (Pomeroy, 2007), culminating in the Pathways to Partnership model, designed to include social sector input in contracting discussions (Coffey, 2018). Conversely, as pathways for discussion were developing between the State and community agencies, there was an evident lack of focus on agencies consulting with their communities. Consequently, an identified concern at the time suggested that partnership models were leading to community agencies favouring engaging with the State over the voices of their own communities and clients (Aimers & Walker, 2008b; Weir, 2009). Such concerns echoed the existing worries in the previous decade that community agencies were becoming extensions, rather than alternatives, to the

State and the need for communities to be empowered in contracting decision-making (Kramer, 1994; Schmid, 2003; Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

Since 2008, procurement policies drifted under the Fifth National Government (2008-2017) and Sixth Labour Government (2017-2023) towards evidence-based, targeted models of procurement known as social investment (Boston, 2017; Chapple, 2017; Coffey, 2018; Eppel & Karacaoglu, 2017; Eppel & Rhodes, 2018; Hanna, 2017; Hyslop & Keddell, 2019; Moore, 2019). Seeking to both embrace, on a surface level, complexity theory and its limitations, social investment placed importance on making decisions which can be supported by evidence from performance measures to meet the needs of clients by defining need in ways that can be measured by the State (Destremau & Wilson, 2017). While social investment is common in some European nations, which focus on improving social outcomes and redistribution of resources, New Zealand diverged in its social investment model by emphasising the concept of investing public funding wisely and financial accountability without focusing on social outcomes as the target (Destremau & Wilson, 2017; Hemerijck & Vandenbroucke, 2012; Moore, 2019). One example of a New Zealand model was the introduction of the then Ministry for Vulnerable Children,⁶ which saw the State attempt to improve fiscal accountability and outcomes by categorising children in various degrees of need (vulnerability) (Keddell, 2020; Moore, 2019). This categorisation was later retracted in legislation, which will be discussed further in the next section, but it demonstrated an ongoing tension within the State when it came to child protection. By categorising clients, the State returned to the knowledge imbalance entrenched in the agency model of procurement theory and cemented this imbalance through the rigorous data collection which accompanies this client targeting model (Destremau & Wilson, 2017).

Social investment draws back on agency theory, resulting in a divergence from the partnership discourse and stewardship theory which had developed under the previous Labour Government. Where stewardship theory sought to encourage mutuality of goals and trust between the State and the social sector in spite of its theoretical limitations, social investment's emphasis on both performance measures for community agencies coupled with definitions of who is considered a 'client' placed a significant burden on community agencies to ensure they were meeting and remaining within their contract parameters (Grey et al., 2015; Nowland-Foreman, 2016). While the Sixth Labour Government adopted a budgetary ethos with a focus on providing holistic support, rather than targeted, they maintained the procurement models of the Fifth National Government due to the existing presence of performance measures for community agencies (Humpage, 2019; Moore, 2019). The prevalence of these issues

⁶ Now known as "Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children"

highlights how dynamics evolved over time between the State and community agencies and the subsequent impact this evolution had on clients receiving supports. Under the Sixth Labour Government, procurement policy continued to evolve in practice as it sought to allow community agencies to meet the needs of their communities. This will be discussed in further detail in the next section with specific reference to child protection procurement policy within New Zealand.

Child Protection Procurement Policy within New Zealand

The introduction of procurement within child protection services has complicated the relationship between responsibility for children and the role of the State. While procurement in fields such as health has resulted in a large shift of not only service delivery but also responsibility, child protection has remained largely controlled by the State by proxy, where community agencies become “third party government” by prioritising State goals (Boston, 1996; Cooke, 2013; Joy, 1996, p. 20). Cooke (2013) argued that this has emerged due a history of systemic issues leading to preventable child abuse under the watch of the State. Conversely, the introduction of the Child, Young Persons & Families Act 1989 following the Puao-te-ata-tū (Daybreak) report led to a more whānau-centred approach to decision-making while the State sought to retain control over the safety of children in the community, leading to the practice of contracting with high levels of State oversight (Hyslop, 2022). At a time when procurement was developing within the context of smaller State involvement with strict accountability measures, the retention of State control over the safety of children’s lives evidences a unique and complex contracting dynamic within the child protection space.

As posited by Hyslop (2022), reduced welfare support under neoliberalism has inadvertently led to increased State expenditure on child protection interventions with marginalised communities due to communities losing reliable welfare support. As a result, neoliberal influences on child protection procurement have resulted in greater expenditure, running contrary to the procurement goals of quality and efficiency. This contradiction of goals between a reduced welfare state and increased State spending on child protection is not unique to New Zealand. In a Swedish case study, researchers found that agreements and decisions made about service delivery are not always followed in times of crisis (Höjer & Forkby, 2011), demonstrating that child protection policy does not always easily follow the previous decisions set in place due to changing circumstances and environment. Due to the complex nature of defining and categorising what safety means for children, it is not surprising that policy which has sought to limit the role of the State has not always had the intended effect when broader welfare reductions in State expenditure have seen increased social inequality (Butler et al., 2017; Hyslop, 2022). As a result, child protection procurement within New Zealand has a complicated history continuing into the present (Hyslop & Keddell, 2019), emerging due to a dual tension of the State attempting to measure

and improve outcomes while being unable to reduce risk as planned through procurement (Cordery, 2012a, 2012b, 2017). As the State takes on risk and responsibility through legislative obligations to ensure the safety of children, the imperative to ensure quality of services becomes more heightened in the procurement process (Hyslop, 2022). As explored in agency theory, a decision must be made by the State in ensuring certain outcomes are met, including the outsourcing and management of risk through contracting. However, due to the historically high level of State involvement in child protection, child protection policy which seeks to contract out services still demonstrates the State's desire to retain control over contracted community agencies, evidenced by tight contract management.⁷

New Zealand literature focused on issues of child protection and social procurement is not hesitant to note the impact of contracting decisions which emphasise high State involvement in contracting (Coffey, 2018; Humpage, 2019; Hyslop, 2022; Kuruvila, 2017; Moore, 2019). It has appeared to worsen over time due to a lack of mutual respect between the State and the social sector whilst, at the same time, the State has pushed increased accountability for broad social outcomes onto community agencies (Grey et al., 2015). Academic concerns can be traced back to the changes in procurement practice which saw an increased focus on targeted supports to meet the needs of those deemed by the State to be 'vulnerable' (Keddell, 2020). State action which guides this practice demonstrates that as procurement theory has developed alongside policy within New Zealand, it has seen a gradual worsening in the relationship between the State and the social sector, resulting in adverse outcomes for clients who are miscategorised, culminating in poor service delivery (Coffey, 2018; Keddell, 2020; Moore, 2019). Akin to developments which led to increased child protection notifications in the 1990s as a result of social inequalities caused by neoliberalism, recent legislation has again created a system which gravitates towards a high threshold for intervention which ignores the systemic inequalities that result in State intervention in the first instance (Hyslop & Keddell, 2018). Consequently, the State overlooks those in need within the community until a high level of State involvement becomes inevitable (Hyslop, 2022). To challenge the existing model, an approach to contracting is needed predicated on reducing risk and ensuring direct delivery of efficient services to communities, however this is not easily achieved considering the history of procurement theory in New Zealand.

In line with the political priorities of the Sixth Labour Government (2017-2023), a model of social procurement reflecting the values of complexity theory was introduced within the procurement space to alleviate the systematic issues which have plagued the child protection context for Māori (Ruckstuhl et al., 2021). By embracing complexity theory in how it recognises that the needs of clients are not

⁷ The impact of this close monitoring is explored in further detail in Chapter Three.

easily defined, social procurement in the child protection context sought to allow contracting outcomes that enable a level of flexibility in defining clients' needs. Due to ongoing concerns about equitable outcomes for minority groups, predominantly Māori, as raised in multiple Oranga Tamariki reports,⁸ Ruckstuhl et al. (2021) discuss the need for a procurement process rooted in social responsibility for communities (NielsenIQ, 2021; Oranga Tamariki Ministerial Advisory Board, 2021). Focusing on social responsibility demonstrates a shift towards the responsibility that community agencies have for the welfare of their own communities contrasted with the State. A starting point has been the applied procurement policy which requires government agencies to award at least five percent of procurement contracts to Māori agencies (Nash & Jackson, 2022; Ruckstuhl et al., 2021).

Change in procurement policy signals both the long-standing issue of community agencies needing autonomy to meet the unique needs of their communities and that these services are often best provided by agencies which share the same worldview as their clients. In addition to such change, Oranga Tamariki has discretionary powers to opt for direct procurement which removes the need to engage in contract bidding, a competitive market element found in traditional procurement (Oranga Tamariki, 2020). This discretionary power allows for direct procurement methods to support engagement with iwi and Māori agencies (NielsenIQ, 2021). For clients, changes in contracting practices directly means that procurement better serves to ensure clients are served by agencies which understand their needs. More broadly, flexible contracting also signals a procurement approach which is less dictated by contracting outcomes and more built on relationships and community agency autonomy, a noticeable shift from agency theory principles which have swayed procurement theory since the 1980s.

The shift towards more flexible procurement approaches removes the competitive element, which procurement is traditionally rooted in, by allowing for procurement based on existing agency relationships. Thus, permitting flexibility of service delivery which allows for greater innovation and service provision for clients (Tadelis, 2012; Wontner et al., 2020). However, recent literature has raised concerns about the prioritisation of social outcomes within this new form of procurement (Malacina et al., 2022; Wontner et al., 2020). Other qualitative research focusing on procurement is hopeful for how value-creation in social procurement can be completed alongside indigenous populations (Denny-Smith et al., 2020). Shifts towards the social procurement approach and the contract measures which account for diverse social outcomes, particularly for Māori, indicate a growing trend. These trends are towards procurement approaches which are more co-operative in nature and embracing of processes which account for the complexity of communities. One example of this has been the Whānau Resilience

⁸ For example, the Hawke's Bay Practice Review (2019) and the Te Kuku o te Manawa – The Office of the Children's Commissioner Report (2020).

programme developed by the Ministry of Social Development and evaluated in 2022 (Grootveld et al., 2022). Grootveld et al. found that the value-creation issues along with resourcing issues were still relevant and required amending to best meet the needs for clients receiving services. It is important that as contracting models progress that the voices of clients are not side-lined in what they, too, can contribute to procurement decisions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has addressed the issue of procurement and its alignment within the social service setting. As a prelude, the first chapter introduced the concept of procurement and the context of neoliberalism which have shaped interactions between the State and community agencies. This chapter has expanded on this by identifying theories which have influenced academic understanding of procurement. Each theory defines the State-community agency relationship in varying levels of power and resource imbalance. Attempts by academics to resolve the tensions which can arise between community agencies and the State often result in communities and clients of services being neglected and excluded from contracting discussions. Trends have been exacerbated by changes the New Zealand political environment has undergone since the 1980s where the influence of neoliberalism has resulted in a growing requirement for strict models of contracting. In the case of child protection policy, this has been increasingly felt due to the legislative responsibility of the State for children while attempting to contract out services to community agencies. In light of these concerns, there have been procurement changes towards accounting not only for the complexity of service delivery but also the complex State-community agency relationship, thus requiring more flexibility in procurement practices. As the perspectives and input of clients have been excluded in historical approaches to procurement, it remains to be seen how the recently developed social procurement framework will incorporate client voices. This research aims to contextualise these client perspectives within these recent theoretical developments.

In the next chapter, these issues are explored in further detail by considering what happens when State-funded contracts change. When contract changes are discussed, they either refer to contracts changing hands between different community agencies or changes in State funding for a single agency. These contract changes have significant impact on practitioners, clients, and how they interact with each other. The next chapter explores these issues and locates them within the broader discussion on how the literature and policy portray the State-community agency relationship.

Chapter Three: When Contracts Change

This research aims to explore how caregiver clients of State-funded community child and family services are impacted when contract changes result in a change of service for the client. It explores how this change impacts on the client-practitioner relationship, the delivery of the service to the client, and how the client perceives the service. In Chapter One, the concept of procurement and the policy context of neoliberalism were introduced. Procurement is the approach of using contracted community agencies to deliver what would otherwise be State services. While community agencies and the State have always interacted in some fashion since Te Tiriti O Waitangi, the 1980s saw the rise of neoliberalism and a policy shift towards stricter State use of funding by reducing the services the State delivers. This has resulted in a welfare approach that sees community agencies being contracted to deliver State services whilst the State retains decision-making and monitoring power over how services are delivered. In Chapter Two, these ideas were expanded by exploring how procurement theory has changed over time, impacting both the State-community agency relationship and how clients receive services. Where the 1980s saw a State-community agency relationship dominated by a power imbalance through restrictions imposed on community agencies by the State, subsequent procurement theories have suggested that a partnership approach should be adopted and performance measures for contracts be loosened. This would permit agencies to meet the complex needs of clients without being limited by contracting requirements but would require a shift in the power imbalance in State-community agency relations. Within the context of New Zealand, theoretical shifts in procurement theory have been influenced by the socio-political context which, though it has sought more holistic outcomes for clients, has still been predominantly neoliberal in theory. The domain of child protection practice has demonstrated an example of this where, due to the State's obligation to the safety of children, has retained significant State power over decision-making despite the growing trends towards contracting out services to the social sector. For clients, this has resulted in a complex environment where the community agency providing services is less able to adopt changes in practice when proscriptive contracting requirements limit action and maintain State influence over service delivery.

This chapter extends the discussion on procurement within New Zealand by considering how complex procurement dynamics result in contract changes within the social sector. These contract changes are reflected when the State alters contract funding or makes the decision to award a contract to another community agency. These issues are first expanded on by considering the impact of neoliberalism on why contracts change in the social sector. This is followed by two perspectives on contract changes, that of the State and the social sector. These sections, underpinned by theory discussed in the previous chapter, explore why procurement decisions can result in contract changes. Following this discussion

is an examination of how these changes impact practitioners and clients. Lastly, ideas are combined to consider how client voices are currently treated within procurement and contracting discourse.

Neoliberalism & Contract Changes

The previous chapter considered how neoliberalism has impacted procurement theory within social services. As this approach developed, the ways in which the State directed and responded to community agencies began to shift in contradictory ways. These messages have ranged from community agencies as proxies of the State to giving community agencies free reign with State funding. As a consequence of this neoliberal influence, community agencies end up bearing the responsibility normally attributed to the State when delivering services, while also becoming accountable to the State for contract outcomes (Butler et al., 2017; Grey et al., 2015; Macfarlane, 2017; Schwartz, 2005).

A compounding factor which exacerbates this State-community agency relationship dynamic is the ability for the State to change either the terms of contracts or the provider of a contract. For example, limits placed on contract terms or length of review periods have a substantial impact on the ability of community agencies to advocate for their clients (Levine, 2009). Additional pressure is also placed on agencies when the State determines the grounds for contract termination (ANGOA, 2012; Came et al., 2017; Cordery, 2012a, 2012b). From a neoliberal perspective, placing limits on contract terms is a further performance and accountability measure to ensure appropriate use of State funding.⁹ While this may afford the State the opportunity to maintain financial oversight of contracts, it limits the ability of agencies to advocate for their clients due to the uncertainty of an agency's future to continue providing the service in the same capacity (Levine, 2009; Mosley, 2012; Schwartz, 2005).

From a community agency perspective, there is not always a consensus within agencies on how contract changes, not only under neoliberalism but also generally, should be approached. For some agencies, this has meant there is a preoccupation with meeting contractual requirements, even if doing so means that clients are not receiving the best service possible from the community agency (Aimers & Walker, 2008b; Boulton et al., 2018; Levine, 2009; Moore, 2019; Price & Kelly, 2021; Renau, 2021; Sawyers, 2016). Literature has also suggested that agencies step outside of their contracts to deliver services as a means of opposing the contract status quo (Aimers & Walker, 2016). However, this suggestion does not consider the wider systemic issues, such as imposing accountability requirements and interagency mistrust, which continue to impact agencies (Macfarlane, 2017; Moore, 2019; Price & Kelly, 2021; Sawyers, 2016; Stott, 2015).¹⁰ Highlighting these issues, contract decisions find their root in neoliberal

⁹ See Chapter Two, pages 10-11

¹⁰ See Chapter One, pages 3-5 & Chapter Two

practice and the divergent views on procurement theory. As will be discussed next, the impacts of neoliberalism's influence are far reaching in not only how community agencies act and perform but also pertaining to how agencies engage with clients.

Procurement Theory & Contract Changes

In the previous chapter, different procurement theories were considered with respect to how they shape the State-community agency relationship.¹¹ Ranging from agency theory during the early rise of neoliberalism to more recent discourse on complexity theory, the State-community agency relationship has fluctuated regarding the balance of power and expectations between the parties. As agency theory has remained a prominent theory within procurement, decisions by the State have exemplified this in contract decisions. For example, the prominence of short contract cycles combined with the impact of historical negative contract behaviour leads to an environment where community agencies are less likely to receive renewed contracts (ANGOA, 2012; Came et al., 2018; Cordery, 2012a, 2012b; Jenkins, 2019). Complicating matters, a partial funding model of service delivery, whereby community agencies receive less funding than what is forecast to be needed to deliver the service, directly impacts the kind of service clients are likely to receive (Jenkins, 2019). Harking back to the Public Finance Act 1989, this behaviour of the State exemplifies an ongoing caution when it comes to the appropriate use of State funding in contracted social services.

More recent theories have emerged centring on the need for autonomy of community agencies to support the complex needs of their clients; however, State implementation of this has been limited (Butler et al., 2017; Keevers et al., 2012; Mosley, 2012; Onyx et al., 2010; Washington et al., 2009).¹² This has, in part, been due to the preference of the State to prioritise new services over existing contracts (Jenkins, 2019). As a result, not only are agencies more inclined to focus on contractual needs instead of client needs but there is also an added sense of competition amongst community agencies to avoid funding cuts and loss of contracts (Came et al., 2018; Cordery, 2012b). Combining the influences of procurement theory with the history of neoliberalism, changes in contracts are not only felt at the State-community agency level but they also extend to how clients receive support directly from the agency.

Community Agencies & Contract Changes

When contracts change for community agencies, impacts are felt in how the community agency operates within itself and how it appears externally to clients. The discussion below explores how agencies

¹¹ See Chapter Two, pages 10-15

¹² See Chapter Two, pages 15-18

understand and implement accountability, the shifting dynamics between community agencies, and the role of the client's voice in decision-making when contracts change.

Accountability

Under the neoliberal procurement model discussed in this research, a prominent issue centres on mutual, but unbalanced, levels of accountability between the State and community agencies which are seen by the State as a justified means to measure outcomes in a contracted social service setting (Boulton et al., 2018; Cordery, 2012a; Grey et al., 2015; Humpage, 2019; Johnston & Romzek, 2008; Joy, 1996; Keevers et al., 2012; Sawyers, 2016). Part of the complexity of accountability within this procurement model concerns the sharing of risks whereby the State delegates this burden to its contracted agencies that would otherwise be borne by the State (Cordery, 2017; Munford & Sanders, 2001; Schwartz, 2005). For community agencies, this delegation of burden results in accountability requiring stricter contractual oversight due to agencies being held accountable for what would otherwise be State responsibilities and services, such as child protection or foster care (Aimers, 2011; Boulton et al., 2018; Butler et al., 2017; Joy, 1996; Keevers et al., 2012; Moore, 2019).

For community agencies, such a burden results in agencies feeling ignored when it comes to influencing client outcomes due to an emphasis placed on contract expectations rather than client engagement (Grey et al., 2015; Sawyers, 2016). Furthermore, as contract expectations are often highly reliant on quantitative data, such as measuring risk, the qualitative information which would better reflect the complex needs for clients are overshadowed due to the perceived immeasurability of these needs and the State's desire to implement fiscally measurable outcomes (Moore & Moore, 2015; Sawyers, 2016). Thus, while community agencies may be able to maintain accountability to the State for contract funding, accountability to clients proportionally diminishes (Aimers & Walker, 2008a, 2008b; Levine, 2009; Renau, 2021; Weir, 2009). One example of this is the lost opportunity agencies have to advocate for their clients as contractual restrictions restrict agencies' focus and resources away from their clients and towards meeting contract compliance (Renau, 2021).

Despite these concerns, attempts from community agencies to rectify imbalances in power and accountability have been unsuccessful, resulting in an ongoing power imbalance between the State and community agencies (Coffey, 2018; Cordery, 2017; Grey et al., 2015). For example, the focus on partnership¹³ has not resulted in any significant change to the accountability structure currently in place (Cordery, 2012a; Grey et al., 2015; Munford & Sanders, 2001; Schwartz, 2005) but has instead remained elusive in practice (Boulton et al., 2018; Grey et al., 2015). In response agencies, hesitant to

¹³ See Chapter Two, pages 11-13

step outside contractual requirements, instead compromise their organisational values in favour of contracting obligations (Aimers & Walker, 2016; International Federation of Social Workers, 2014; Moore, 2019; Price & Kelly, 2021). This occurs when practitioners practise in ways to support meeting funding obligations, even if these run contrary to the needs of clients (Price & Kelly, 2021).

Interagency Relationships

An unintended consequence of the market competition created between community agencies is an increase in interagency cooperation (Butler et al., 2017; Collins-Camargo et al., 2011; Cordery, 2012a, 2012b; Munford & Sanders, 2001; Peat & Costley, 2001; Schwartz, 2005; Strier, 2019). Manifestations of this cooperation have ranged from community agencies refusing contracts to agencies consolidating practice and information across community agencies to achieve better outcomes for clients despite contractual limitations (Collins-Camargo et al., 2011; Onyx et al., 2010). For example, it would benefit clients for previous contracted agencies to have input into contract management for succeeding contractors to improve future contract outcomes and mitigate any loss in support for clients despite the change in community agency (Peat & Costley, 2001). As changes in contracts impact clients, the need for interagency relationships becomes crucial to ensuring the best client outcomes in the current procurement environment. Combining the need for interagency relationships with the redirection of accountability towards clients, the need for clients' voices becomes more apparent when contracts change as community agencies acknowledge the need to engage with clients throughout the contract change process.

Client Voices

The lack of client voices in procurement processes has been an issue globally and within New Zealand as clients are significantly impacted by contract changes (Aimers & Walker, 2008b; Aimers & Walker, 2016; Boon et al., 2017; Brodtkin, 1997; Döbl & Ross, 2013; Johnston & Romzek, 2008; King, 2021; LeRoux, 2009; Macfarlane, 2017; Peat & Costley, 2001; Price & Kelly, 2021; Sawyers, 2016; Steen & Smith, 2011). While clients develop ways to self-advocate outside of their agency supports, this is often due to the exclusion of clients' voices in the current neoliberal contracting system (Carnochan & Austin, 2015; Gummer, 1979; Kissane, 2010; Yan et al., 2017). This is in part due to clients' awareness of contractual limitations placed on agencies, thus resulting in the client belief that they cannot rely on community agencies for support due to the existing procurement model which excludes them (Kissane, 2010).

Multiple factors impact on clients' experiences of contract changes, such as the instability caused for clients due to the change in the client-practitioner relationship and the potential change in the agency itself when a contract is awarded to another agency (Bunger et al., 2016; Jim, 1998; Johnston &

Romzek, 2008; Ortega & Levy, 2002). As the client-practitioner relationship is at the centre of service delivery and meeting clients' needs, this relationship is core to how supported clients feel (Döbl & Ross, 2013; Moore, 2019; Oakden et al., 2021; Washington et al., 2009). When issues arise for clients, they are hesitant to raise worries or feel unable to complain (Brodkin, 1997). Another impacting factor is agency communication during change. The responsiveness of the agency itself is important to meet clients' needs, rather than who holds the contract (Kim & Stoner, 2008; Steen & Smith, 2011). In this context, agency responsiveness would include clear lines of communication and transparency with clients, not just at the practitioner level, but in all dealings the agency has with the client (Brodkin, 1997; Kim & Stoner, 2008). This is why interagency cooperation is imperative in the contracting environment due to the possibility and eventuality of contracts changing. Coupled with ensuring client input into the contract decision-making process, such changes would mitigate the experienced loss of client-practitioner relationship while maintaining service provision.

A taut aspect of this debate returns to the question of whose voices should be present in decision-making. While it is acknowledged that client voices are missing from contract decision-making, the desire for the practitioner to advocate for the client can also result in the practitioner speaking for the client unintentionally at the clients' expense (Coffey, 2018; Macfarlane, 2017; Price & Kelly, 2021). Such a disparity occurs as a result of divergent perspectives conflicting with one another where jargon and conflicting priorities result in the client voice being muted not only at the contract level but also at the agency level (Aimers & Walker, 2016; Boon et al., 2017). A key cause of this behaviour is the influence of neoliberalism on how agencies act and the subsequent ways neoliberalism impacts practitioners' interactions with clients (Aimers & Walker, 2016; Coffey, 2018; Döbl & Ross, 2013; Sawyers, 2016). By focusing on risk and target populations in need of support, client voices become separated from the very services they are seeking to receive (Coffey, 2018; Renau, 2021). When this occurs, client perspectives needed in contract decision-making become overshadowed by bureaucracy at both the State and the community agency levels.

Chapter Summary

Within the broader context of procurement and the influence of neoliberalism, this chapter has discussed the phenomenon of contract changes and the direct impact they have on clients. Contract changes themselves are not removed from this context but are an extension of the neoliberal focus on efficiency of service delivery and ensuring public funding is being spent responsibly. Consequently, these contract changes impact on both practitioners and clients alike in how these two groups interact with each other. Contract changes lead to practitioners and their agencies needing to focus on reporting requirements, preoccupation with funding, and how they interact with other agencies. For clients, this means that service delivery does not always meet their needs and can result in inconsistency of supports. When

contracts do change, client voices are minimised in the process when they should be the voices most considered as recipients of the supports being contracted because of the impact such changes have on clients' lives. Taking these issues into account, the following chapter discusses the methodology and method adopted in this research to explore these issues further.

Chapter Four: Methodology and Method

This chapter discusses the methodology and method employed in this research. The methodology and method chosen for this research seek to address the perspective of clients when faced with the phenomenon of contract changes in the social sector, and the impact these changes have on their relationship with community agencies and service delivery. This chapter outlines critical realism as the theoretical framework, the rationale for a qualitative methodology, and the goals of the study. The research design, recruitment, and sampling are then considered followed by an examination of semi-structured interviews as the research method. The use of abductive thematic analysis is justified as the analytical approach and consideration is given to the ethical considerations, including the researcher's position, and the limitations of this study.

Theoretical Positioning

Theoretical positioning within research is important as it guides the way in which data is collected and how it is later analysed (Bahari, 2010; O'Leary, 2014). For example, the presence of epistemology and ontology within research both heavily influence how research is conducted and the analysis of data (Bahari, 2010; Punch, 2016). Where epistemology encompasses bodies of knowledge and how knowledge is obtained about reality, ontology involves beliefs about the nature of reality (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Within research, this distinction is starkly evident between different methodological approaches because of the assumptions that epistemological and ontological claims hold (Bahari, 2010). For example, in epistemology, where qualitative research stresses the validity of different interpretations of reality, quantitative research assumes there is only one way to interpret data due to an objective reality (Bahari, 2010). Such a distinction stems out of competing ontological ideas, where the former supports a subjective notion of reality while the latter assumes an objective reality that can be measured (O'Leary, 2014). Thus, the methodological question faced by the researcher is how best to interact not only with reality but also with how we come to know what is real (Punch, 2016). While this divide is clearly seen between quantitative and qualitative methodology, the distinction between ontology and epistemology becomes blurred when considering the claims of the qualitative research tradition. When conducting qualitative research with participants in a social setting, such as when contracts change, this realisation becomes significant because of the diverse independent and equally valid perspectives participants can hold about the same event. To address this challenge, critical realism has been adopted as the research position for this study. This is explored in further detail in the next section.

Critical realism

Critical realism as a theoretical research position, is located within the postmodern school of social and critical theory. Before postmodernism, research philosophy was predicated on quantitative epistemological and ontological notions of an objective and measurable reality (Punch, 2016). Challenging these ideas in the 1970s, philosopher Roy Bhaskar sought a means to avoid the rigidity of scientific knowledge (realism) whilst circumventing the contradictory notion that all of reality is socially constructed (social constructionism)¹⁴ (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Fleetwood, 2014). Instead, Bhaskar argued that the research tendency to confuse ontology and epistemology, the assumption that knowledge held about reality accurately represents reality, results in social constructs being ignored as researchable events (Eastwood et al., 2014). In order to support this idea, critical realism claims that ontology, the nature of reality, is fragmented between what is experienced (the empirical), what happens independent of being experienced (the actual), and 'causal mechanisms' which cause societal change (the real) (Eastwood et al., 2014; Fleetwood, 2014). This ontological distinction is core to the critical realist methodology and is valuable when researching causal mechanisms, such as neoliberalism and procurement theory, as critical realism provides a means to evaluate mechanisms through the lens of participant experiences.

While the empirical and actual operate at the surface level, causal mechanisms exist beneath what is experienced, thus the context in which a mechanism emerges influences how it is defined and experienced socially (Eastwood et al., 2014; Fletcher, 2017). Commenting on this, Alvesson & Skoldberg state (2018, p. 50), "Something is real if it has a causal effect, that is if it affects behaviour and makes a difference". Thus, this permits a critical realist position to consider the real impact of social constructs on individuals. Premised on the idea of social constructs as causal mechanisms, critical realism imposes theoretical limitations on how data is treated in the analysis stage given the contextual acknowledgement of how causal mechanisms operate (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). This position supports a research approach whereby an objective reality is acknowledged but the way in which it is known is via individuals' subjective experiences. While either social constructionism or realism would emphasise the experiences or the objective nature of the impact a causal mechanism holds, critical realism provides an alternative epistemological avenue (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

A unique challenge which critical realism poses is that melding of epistemology and ontology. As primarily an ontology-based theory, as it is concerned about the nature of things, while being couched

¹⁴ While used interchangeably with social constructivism at times in literature, social constructionism argues reality being socially constructed, while social constructivism is the individual process of understanding reality through social interaction (Andrews, 2012).

in the ways in which reality is perceived by individuals, the distinction between what is known (epistemology) and what things are (ontology) is broken down (Fleetwood, 2014; Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). For example, the goals of this study seek to explore how subjective experiences of participants are shaped by an external, objective phenomenon that emerges within the procurement context: alterations to State-funded child and family service contracts. Influenced by causal mechanisms, the practice of a contract change rooted in procurement practice is an event that impacts all participants independently but the experience of each participant is individually subjective. The nature of these experiences emerges primarily because of the causal mechanisms that influence the occurrence of contract changes.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methodology, underpinned by theory, is valuable within social policy due to the emphasis placed on the role and contribution of the participant to the research. It affords the complementary opportunities for reality to be interpreted through the subjective lens of participants and for those perspectives to be addressed with respect to each participant's subjective meaning (Fossey et al., 2002). This is in contrast to quantitative research which has the primary goal of measurement, rather than attributing meaning to experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This distinction is important to the research topic due to the emphasis placed on participant/caregiver experiences in understanding the impact of contract changes as a phenomenon.

This research was completed as a qualitative-exploratory study using thematic analysis, informed by critical realist theory. The purpose of qualitative-exploratory research is to shed light on an identified area of research in existing literature where an opportunity is present for the researcher and participants to provide additional knowledge on an issue (Hunter et al., 2019). Among other similar purposes, Stevens et al. (2013) identified exploratory research as seeking to clarify an ambiguous issue and providing further insight for decision-making purposes. They noted that this research approach often includes the development of a literature review to address the overarching issues, followed by interviews with participants deemed to have the required experience to address the issues identified in the literature. As the literature identified in Chapter Three found, while contract changes are a common concern within community agency procurement, the perspectives of clients within procurement are not widely researched. Thus, this research seeks to explore the voices of clients and their experiences within this environment.

Goals of the Study

Considering the critical realist approach of this research, this research explored how caregiver clients of State-funded community child and family services are impacted when contract changes result in a change of service for the client. The aims of this study were to:

- Explore the relational experiences of social service contracting between professionals and clients.
- Explore how these contract changes impact on client perception and reception of services.
- Discuss how client perspectives could be integrated into policy when contract changes occur.

The following discussion addresses the methods of this research which sought to fulfil these goals.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were the method for this research. Participant recruitment was divided into two stages. Stage One consisted of contacting community agencies to query the occurrence of contract changes for the contacted agencies and to scope the possibility of advertisement on behalf of the researcher. The second stage initially comprised a Process A (clients) and Process B (professional volunteers) recruitment strategy. These two strategies intentionally targeted different participant pools. This approach was adopted due to the lack of public information available about instances of contract changes, and uncertainty about whether clients of services were aware of contracts or how they could change. However, during the research, ample volunteer client participants were interviewed, removing the necessity to action Process B.

Stage One: Contacting Community Agencies

The researcher contacted local community agencies via email to introduce the research topic and to explore whether a). contracts had changed for agencies and, if so, then b). would the respective agencies be agreeable to advertise the research to their clientele once full ethics had been approved. This course of action was approved via a low-risk notification (ID: 4000025993) and agencies were provided the Letter to Organisations (Appendix A) and the Process A Information Sheet (Appendix B). During contact with agencies, the researcher was advised that whilst contracts had not changed for the contacted agencies, they were agreeable to advertise the research once the full ethics application had received approval.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was adopted in this study due to the small sample group and the qualitative nature of the study. A purposive sample supports participant recruitment which aligns with the client experiences sought, namely that of being in receipt of a contracted community agency service whilst the service has undergone a contract change (Etikan et al., 2016). This sampling was achieved by recruiting through community agencies who work with caregiver clients.

Eight participants were interviewed over an eight-week period between March and April in 2023, composed of clients of contracted services delivered by community agencies. As sufficient clients volunteered for the study, no professional participants were sought. All interviews were conducted on Zoom. A small sample size was justified due to the qualitative nature of the data and the opportunity for in-depth information which can be gathered during the course of a semi-structured interview (Malterud et al., 2016; Morse, 2000; Terry et al., 2017). Clients were chosen for this study due to lack of consideration given to client perspectives in the literature, often with preference given to the perspectives of practitioners instead (Butler et al., 2017; Coffey, 2018; Peat & Costley, 2001; Price & Kelly, 2021). By focusing solely on the perspectives of clients, this afforded the opportunity to gather data outside the professional sphere of contracting (O'Leary, 2014).

The recruitment advertisements provided an explanation of the purpose of the study and advisement that participants would receive a \$20 Countdown voucher (see Appendices C & D respectively for the Process A Advertisement and Process B Advertisements). Volunteers who contacted the researcher received further information on the purpose of the study (see Appendices B & E respectively for the Process A Information Sheet and Process B Information Sheet) and a Consent Form (Appendix F) to be signed and returned prior to the commencement of the respective interview. This ensured transparency of the interview process by providing the volunteer the opportunity to understand the research before making an informed decision to either proceed or withdraw from the research (O'Leary, 2014).

Stage Two – Process A: Client Participant Recruitment

A full ethics application was submitted to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. Once the full ethics application received approval (Appendix G), the previously contacted community agencies were emailed (Appendix H) with a request that the research be advertised to their respective clients. In addition to the Process A Information Sheet (Appendix B), community agencies were also provided the Process A Advertisement (Appendix C). Included in the advertisement was the inclusion criteria utilised in this research stage which ensured participants were recruited who have had experiences relevant to the research question (O'Leary, 2014). The inclusion criteria were:

- Participants must have received child and family support (e.g. social work support, therapy) from a community agency in the past five years; and,
- Been a client of this support when the community agency providing the service changed

Once volunteers expressed interest, they were provided with the Consent Form prior to the interview.

Stage Two – Process B: Professional Participant Recruitment

In the research design phase, literature advised that six to eight participants is a suitable sample size for a qualitative study (Malterud et al., 2016; Morse, 2000; Terry et al., 2017). Due to the lack of public information available about instances of contracts changing for community agencies, Process B was also included in the full ethics application, should there be an insufficient number of client volunteers for this research. For Process B, this included a draft email to community agencies (Appendix I) requesting the need for professional participants in the absence of client volunteers, the Process B Advertisement (Appendix D), the Process B Information Sheet (Appendix E), and the Process B Interview Schedule (Appendix J).

The inclusionary criteria created for Stage Two in this research limited participants to experiences from the past five years. Justification for this limitation is based on the findings of Renau (2021) and Coffey (2018) who identified that the current approach to procurement, built on a social investment ethos, has been prevalent since the mid-2010s, introduced by the Fifth National Government. This inclusionary criteria assisted with a). obtaining experiences which were recent and more easily recalled by participants and b). documenting contract changes which had occurred under the same political ethos of social investment. This enhanced the reliability of the study by seeking to maintain the same political context of the experiences being described by interviewees (O'Leary, 2014). Possible contract changes under the Sixth Labour government were included in this sampling because the Sixth Labour Government had continued the previous Government's procurement policies (Humpage, 2019; Moore, 2019).

Following the initial advertisement of the research, approximately forty potential client participants from Process A contacted the researcher within the first two weeks after the release of the advertisement. As a result, the full number of participants sought were able to be interviewed. The surplus volunteers were thanked for their interest and advised the research pool had reached capacity. They were provided the option of having their contact details held on file by the researcher until completion of examination process in the event one of the original participants was not available or withdrew from the study. Surplus volunteers who responded to this offer had their contact details maintained while the remaining volunteers' contact details were deleted. Though no one withdrew from the study, several initial

participants were uncontactable after initially expressing interest, resulting in the researcher drawing from the pool of surplus volunteers. Surplus volunteers were chosen based on order of initial contact.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the chosen method for this research. These were conducted via Zoom, averaging around 60 minutes per interview. Use of Zoom permitted time and location flexibility for participants so that participants could be interviewed from around New Zealand. Use of online Zoom interviews also supported the use of non-verbal cues in the interview by permitting the researcher to observe participants' facial expressions and other observable body language (Fylan, 2005). Interview preparation occurred via themes identified in the literature review to guide open-ended questions. The Process A Interview Schedule (Appendix K) was kept short for the purpose of building upon participants' experiences, rather than being guided by literature (Fylan, 2005; Stevens et al., 2013). Doing this supported participants to discuss their experiences in their own words in accordance with the exploratory approach taken (O'Leary, 2014). Furthermore, the chosen method permitted sufficient time and space for participants to elaborate on otherwise unanticipated topics to ensure they were appropriately explored (Adams, 2015).

For the interviews, the Zoom recording feature was utilised alongside a recorder. As Zoom automatically captures both the video and audio recording, volunteers were advised in the Consent Form that, though video would be captured, it would immediately be deleted following each interview. Following transcribing of each interview, participants were sent the finished transcript for content verification to ensure participants were satisfied with the data prior to analysis beginning (McLaughlin, 2012; O'Leary, 2014). One participant requested an amendment to their transcript for the purpose of historical accuracy but the corrected data was not used in the research findings due to confidentiality. Participants were also offered a summary of findings at the completion of the research.

Thematic Analysis

Upon completion of the data collection, thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data. The approach used was based on critical realist principles by acknowledging the validity of participant experiences located within a common experience – the change of a contract (Fryer, 2022). This process was led by reflective qualitative analysis, in keeping with critical realism, which provides the researcher with the opportunity to develop themes from the data collected, code, and establish meaning to the data with ongoing consideration for the research aims (Fryer, 2022; O'Leary, 2014). The critical realist approach, using reflexive thematic analysis, permits the researcher to access data as “situated, interpreted realities, not simple, decontextualised truths” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 171). In practice, this meant

acknowledging and placing participants' accounts within the broader environmental context created by causal mechanisms.

Due to the qualitative nature of the data and the approach adopted, these analysis steps became intertwined, requiring the researcher to carefully self-examine any imposed themes influenced by the literature or the researcher's own experiences working for a contracted community agency in the child and family sector (O'Leary, 2014). Attempts to mitigate this impact were done by consideration of the insider position. While the concept of insider positioning, whereby the researcher is seen to have 'insider' knowledge or influence in the research, is a debated topic within literature, the concept of insider positioning requires attention within this research (Milligan, 2016; Sherry, 2008). One way of mitigating this was through the use of ethical qualitative research where participants' lived experiences are measured by the value attributed to them by the participants themselves, rather than by how they are interpreted in the data (Kirchin, 2003). To further mitigate the imposition of the researcher's own value on what participants share, a reflexive journal was used throughout the data collection process. A reflexive journal is a strategy used complementary to the method utilised as a means of addressing research bias and assumptions which may emerge during data collection and analysis (Ortlipp, 2008).

The analytical approach adopted in this research was abductive reasoning. Abductive analysis has similar tenets to that of inductive analysis, the latter which supports themes to emerge within the raw data without pre-established themes (O'Leary, 2014; Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). However, whilst inductive analysis focuses on the surface accounts of participants, an abductive approach first draws out themes from the raw data before later examining theory to consider what the best possible explanation is for the data available (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). Because of the critical nature of critical realism which acknowledges the social context of causal mechanisms, an abductive approach recognises that analytical findings are still rooted within the social context from which they emerged, thus seeking to present the best possible outcome in the circumstances. While this approach relies on available literature to analyse data, it still permits opportunity for theory-creation and divergence if data does not align with existing theory (Eastwood et al., 2014).

Repeated engagement with the raw data supported theme development and corroborating the different interviews which allowed for the coding to develop throughout the analysis process (Terry et al., 2017). Careful examination of the transcripts occurred to ensure appropriate consideration was given to the way participants expressed themselves and the words utilised so to as to mitigate the imposition of the researcher's interpretation (O'Leary, 2014). These themes included phrases such as "How caregivers understand funding limitations for agencies when it comes to contract funding" and "How caregivers find support amongst the agencies". These themes were then explored using Microsoft OneNote to map and categorise the identified themes as this enabled ongoing analysis between data (O'Leary, 2014). By

categorising these broad themes into categories focusing on causal mechanisms, themes such as ‘The complexities of caregiving’ and ‘The current funding model’ emerged. Identification of these themes synthesised the participants’ experiences with the underlying causal mechanisms which influence their lived experiences. The researcher was also mindful of personal bias in the establishing of themes due to the researcher’s own experiences of observing community agency contract changes as an outsider and the limited personal findings these experiences may impose on the data itself and how it was interpreted. The influence of this can be mitigated through careful coding of the collected data, verification of the transcripts with participants, and through the research supervisory relationship throughout the research process (O’Leary, 2014). These safeguards provided opportunity for the researcher to cross-examine and consult on data to prevent personal bias from influencing the analytical process.

Ethical Considerations

The key ethical principles adopted in this research drew heavily from ethical principles in the social work profession, as the researcher is a registered social worker. Adoption of these principles helped mitigate the ethical issues identified. This was done by addressing the researcher’s role in harm minimisation; responsibilities to Te Tiriti O Waitangi, both academically and professionally; the presence of power imbalances in research; the role of participant autonomy; and confidentiality throughout the process.

Ethics principles in research focus on the responsibility of the researcher to participants to ensure a). harm minimisation, b). participant confidentiality, and c). research integrity (O’Leary, 2014). These obligations are couched by moral and professional obligations which are encapsulated by the revised *Code for Ethical Conduct of Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants* (Massey University, 2017). It is important that professional principles set out by institutions are followed so that both participants and researchers are safe whilst the integrity of the institution, Massey University in this case, is maintained (Punch, 2016).

As a registered social worker, the researcher was under obligation by the Code of Ethics set out by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB). The Code requirements aligned with the Massey University Code, including a responsibility to Te Tiriti O Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) and practice which supports the best interests of client groups (Massey University, 2017; Social Workers Registration Board, 2016). Combining these professional obligations with the Massey University Code provided an ethical framework which sought to both maintain the university’s integrity and that of the social work profession. The significance of this is also highlighted by the status of Te Tiriti as a constitutional document of Aotearoa New Zealand (Social Workers Registration Board, 2016).

When engaging with Māori as participants, the university code requires cultural oversight when engaging cross-culturally in academic research (Massey University, 2017). This is important because of complexities of researching bi-culturally as a Pākehā which require oversight to avoid imposing Western cultural notions on an indigenous perspective (Darder, 1991; Mataira, 1995). Thus, any engagement with Māori as participants in this research required consideration of cultural bias. This was mitigated through the support of a cultural advisor in the research process who provided oversight during the data collection and analysis process when engaging with Māori participants.

Furthermore, due to the status of the participants as clients and the power imbalances inherent in the data, the principles of the university code were upheld through the methodology and method of the research, whereby the data collected was driven by the lived autonomous experiences of voluntary participants. By embracing this interpretation, opportunity for research bias of data was minimised. Additionally, the university code was adhered to through the use of informed consent, confidentiality of participants through the use of pseudonyms, and post-interview interactions with participants in the research process to ensure transcript accuracy as defined by the participants. These principles, applicable to all forms of ethics in research, are as much about ensuring the welfare of participants as they are about gathering data (Connolly & Harms, 2009). To ensure that participants were fully informed, participants received the Process A Information Sheet (Appendix B) and a Consent Form (Appendix F). By doing this, participants had the opportunity to query and understand the research they were consenting to so that any decision to participate came from an informed position (Massey University, 2017). This approach of informed consent was further strengthened by providing the opportunity for participants to verify written interview transcripts.

Participants were advised of the use of pseudonyms in data analysis to limit the identifiable characteristics of the participants. References to the community agency providers, of which participants had been clients, were also excluded from data analysis to maintain confidentiality of both the clients and the agencies (McLaughlin, 2012). While this impacted on the reliability of the data collected due to the variation of providers that could be represented in the collection, the purpose of the research was still maintained as its focus was on client perspectives under the same procurement model within child and family services rather than specific community agencies, thus negating the necessity to identify agencies in the research.

Confidentiality and security of data was ensured by holding data securely on the researcher's PIN-secured laptop. Following each interview, any interviews audio recordings were transferred to the computer within 24 hours of the interview being conducted to minimise risk of leaked data during the research process. These recordings were immediately deleted after transfer to the computer. Automatic

video recordings on Zoom were also deleted following each interview. A year following the examination process, the relevant transcripts and recordings will be permanently deleted from the computer.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the nature of a qualitative study, an inherent limitation was the lack of transferability and confirmability of the research, thus impacting the trustworthiness, due to the individual contract changes and experiences explored in this research (Came et al., 2018; O'Leary, 2014). As clients from across different community agencies were recruited, the data was subject to contract-specific scenarios.

An additional limitation stemmed from the theoretical approach adopted. As critical realism was the analytical framework with abductive reasoning, an axiom of the abductive approach is that as observations are based on socially constructed phenomenon, the results were limited to the social context. This needs to be considered with any future research which would seek to transfer findings from this thesis.

A further limitation was that all participants were female caregivers. While male caregivers responded to the research advertisement, they either did not meet the criteria or were surplus to the research sample. This limited the generalisability of the results to a subset of current caregivers in New Zealand. Despite these limitations, the research findings do contribute to knowledge regarding clients' understanding and perspectives of contract decision-making and would provide proximal similarity, thus being generalisable within a similar population group.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological framework which underpins this research. Critical realism served as the theoretical framework whereby individual participant accounts were treated as qualitative data situated within causal mechanisms which influence State-funded social service contracts. Semi-structured interviews were employed to obtain the data and abductive thematic analysis was adopted to interpret the interviews within the framework aligned with the theoretical approach of this study. Ethical considerations and study limitations were considered to mitigate the impact on participants during the study whilst maintaining the research focus. The research findings are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Findings

This research aims to explore how caregiver clients of State-funded community child and family services are impacted when contract changes result in a change of service for the client. This chapter presents the results from eight semi-structured interviews. Having implemented the data analysis methods described in the previous chapter, this chapter is divided based on the emerging themes in the data. These themes centre on how participants understood their role when contracts change and the ways in which changes impacted their lives. The chapter also details participants' understandings of how contracting works within community agencies and the importance of the caregiver-practitioner role during times of contract change. The chapter finishes with participants' views on how their voices were heard in the contracting process and what their hopes were for the future.

Participants

The eight participants were female caregivers of various ages from different cities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand and were a mix of family and non-family caregivers. Their diverse backgrounds and experiences with social services contributed to varying perspectives on issues of contracts and funding. All participants were interviewed via Zoom.

Table 1: Participants

Name	Caregiver role	Experience
Martha	Family	Provider change
Beth	Family	Loss of service
Sarah	Family	Loss of funding for service
Zoe	Family	Change in service eligibility
Susan	Non-family	Loss of service
Jackie	Non-family	Loss of service
Hannah	Family	Loss of service
Tina	Non-family	Provider change

Martha was a family caregiver for over ten years caring for her grandchild who was receiving health-related supports. Martha's life was impacted by a provider change for a service she had been receiving. For a separate service, she also discovered new funding that had not previously been an option.

Beth had cared for her grandchildren for more than ten years. She had received support from several agencies regarding her family's dynamics. She was impacted by a community agency contract change which resulted in the service shutting down shortly after she was referred to the agency. Beth had no alternative service to seek support from at the time.

Sarah was also a family caregiver caring for grandchildren over the last ten years. A contract change meant she experienced a loss of funding for a therapeutic service her grandchildren were receiving. She opted to pay for the service herself after the contracted funding ended due to the benefit the service provided for her grandchildren.

Zoe cared for her younger brother as a family caregiver and had been doing this for five years. She received housing support, experiencing both service denial and acceptance from two agencies due to criteria restrictions as well as lack of funding available. When Zoe was unable to receive support, she had no alternative services to seek support from.

Susan was a non-family caregiver caring for two primary-aged siblings. She had been undertaking the role for less than five years. Susan had received social work support but experienced a loss of service from a contracted agency. There was no alternative service available at the time. She was able to eventually receive support from the same agency until the support was concluded.

Jackie was a non-family caregiver for less than ten years, caring for a teenager in her home. She experienced the closure of a caregiving service provided by a community agency and had to transition to another agency to receive the same support.

Hannah had lots of experience as a family caregiver, providing care for the past 30 years. The children she cared for were from various age groups and primarily within the area of disability. She experienced the loss of a service that closed shortly before she made contact. No alternative agency was available which could provide the same support. Hannah was receiving support from the same community agency for other services during this time.

Tina was a non-family caregiver for the last ten years, caring for two siblings, while receiving caregiver support. She experienced a change of community agency where the contract was awarded to another agency. This resulted in Tina engaging with a new agency for the same service.

The Complexities of Caregiving

Caregiving, and the complex responsibilities it entails, was an important issue for participants. Participants identified that their lives were complex before contract changes occurred. Speaking on the strain placed on her family, Martha shared,

I can't go to work, I can't get paid not to go to work, so we have to use [the grandchild's] money to live. That is very hard to live with... With the journey I've had, it has worn me down very much mentally... I've only been able to deal with the day-to-day stuff within our lives... I could share all day and night... All I've got to say is it's a hard system, it's a very hard system.

Martha's feelings were echoed in the voices of other participants. Beth spoke about the caregiver role as being “*a hard life*” and how her life changed once she became a caregiver. Speaking about getting support as a caregiver, Beth shared, “*It was quite daunting, because you don't know what you're going into, but you need support so you kind of latch onto whatever you can get out there, but there isn't too much [support].*” Concurring with Martha and Beth, Sarah stated that caregiving felt like “*a long process*” because of the complexity and emotional hardship experienced.

As contract changes exacerbated feelings of frustration, most participants identified that their needs, and the needs of the children they care for, persisted even when contract changes occur. Susan encapsulated this sentiment when she asserted, “*A family, their problem just doesn't go away.*” For Martha, the change became tied to the age of her grandchild, “*When [the grandchild] turned two, all funding stopped. The condition hadn't stopped, the funding stopped.*”

Each of the above experiences, despite their different contexts, reflected the daily life of caregivers. Participants said caregiving, and the situational contexts of caregiving, added significant complexity to their lives before discussing the impact of contract changes. Considering this, participants' understanding of how funding operated differed, which is explored in the next section.

The Current Funding Model

Caregivers' understanding and feelings varied about how funding worked for community agencies. For Martha, her feelings were tied to the general busyness of life, *"It's very hard because everything's so full on. When we're going through this, the last thing I've actually been asking is: 'Who funds you?'"* This uncertainty extended to other participants' accounts. Expanding on this idea, though not expressing concern about the issue, Tina believed that services she had received were extensions of government services:

Yeah, I had no idea. I just presumed that they were like, I guess I was a bit naïve in a way. I didn't actually realise they contracted to the government as such, I thought they were just an offshoot... I don't think it mattered to me at the time.

Tina's comments reflected a sentiment of not initially perceiving where the division between who provides the service and the government department providing funding. While Tina's view was unique, others indicated they held some understanding of how the funding worked but it remained unclear how contract decisions were made. Jackie spoke of the contract tendering process but remained unclear how this applied to the supports she received, *"I mean, I was aware of [how the funding worked]... I don't know if there was tendering process or anything, but they have to tender."* Susan *"didn't think about [the funding] at all"* and Zoe *"assumed... that [the agencies] were government funded."*

For Martha and Hannah, advocating practitioners' involvement prevented their understanding of how funding worked for community agencies. In their experience, practitioners would take on an advocacy role limiting the caregivers' engagement and understanding of funding. Hannah clarified *"[Social workers] take care of what agencies and what's needed and they go through that, so I'm sort of not in the know how in that one as much."* Martha and Hannah perceived this intervention as a relief, not having to deal with the funding themselves. Martha explained:

[Agencies' names] never gave up, because I would have. I would not have sat down and looked to see what was available, not at that stage... So, I was very thankful I could talk to people... [finding supports is] very hard, it's very blurred.

Here, Martha recognised the importance of funding combined with the busyness of her life meant that the practitioners' advocacy was crucial in her funding journey. This involvement also meant that Martha's own knowledge was limited about the funding process and what this might mean.

Despite varied understandings of how funding operates, participants recognised its importance. While participants did not always find the funding easy to navigate, some participants identified funding could

also be complex for the practitioners supporting them. This professional support served as both a source of support and limitation on knowledge, an issue which is explored later in this chapter.

Participants, while facing the complexity of their own lives, still expressed awareness of the difficult funding situations agencies experienced. Zoe, Beth, and Susan asserted that, despite the client's needs being present, contract funding was not always available to meet them. Zoe reflected, *"To be honest with you, I think it's fair enough, if [community agencies] only get a certain amount of money and they do have to prioritise who they help, and they can't be helping everyone."* Tina also echoed the sentiment that contract funding primarily comes down to money. Commenting on an email she received when the contract change occurred, Tina noted, *"I actually felt sad for [agency name] because they weren't successful at the time because they weren't successful in that tender process, but it is what it is."*

These comments reflected an attitude amongst some participants that empathised with community agencies and the current funding environment. Though participants acknowledged that funding had a flow-on impact on their own lives, and that this impact was not always fully understood by agencies, participants were still aware of the difficult funding situation faced by agencies. This empathy highlighted not only participants' awareness but formed a precursor to the way participants viewed the caregiver-practitioner relationship.

Experiencing Contract Change

Most participants expressed degrees of uncertainty and frustration when speaking about experiencing changes in contracts and funding. Beth spoke of the experience being *"mind blowing"* and leaving her feeling *"floored"* and *"alone"*. For Hannah, the loss of a service was *"the worst thing that could have happened."* Martha, who spoke about the government department itself, argued, *"It is actually a full-time job trying to make [government department] accountable."* Susan, expanded on this, framing her feelings within the context of the funding issues agencies experience, *"Really concerned, really concerned. You know, I'm thinking this through as I speak and I said, I understand their funding problem, but then I'm thinking, 'But we are the family that was on their books.'" By this, Susan identified the frustrated expectation that agencies are accountable to their clients and that it needs to be recognised that contract changes have a negative impact on clients' lives.*

Susan's experience reflected a common idea that while contract changes were significant for agencies, they were even more significant for the families reliant on the services. Hannah mentioned, *"All I can*

think is 'Where did [the service] go?' And then I thought, 'Why?' Because there's a great need for it and so why did it get cut?" Building on this, Tina described this feeling as being “*left to your own devices*” and having to “*wait [the contract change] out*”, rather than being supported by the agency through the contract change. Consequently, for Jackie, this meant showing initiative taking it upon herself to respond to the situation:

I just feel like, I don't know what the word is, it's not so much frustrated... we just have to be pragmatic here, you know. I'm also a little bit defiant, like, I've solved your friggin' problem... I'm not bending anymore for you.

Jackie's words highlighted a level of frustration with agencies during contract changes because of the outsized impact these changes have on clients.

Participants conveyed a range of different emotions that connected to contract changes. The different responses to these feelings were reflected starkly in Tina and Jackie's words, representing similar but distinct responses to their own contracting context between waiting for agencies to act or choosing to act on their own without agency initiative. They reflected how stressful change was for the caregivers given how important the services were for them within the already complex dynamics in their lives. The way in which caregivers received the information and whether it came through the community agency providing the service became a compounding factor for participants.

Agency Communication with Caregivers

Most participants stressed how important it was for community agencies to be accountable and communicate with clients during contract changes. Participants discussed accountability as how agencies supported and communicated with caregivers when contracts changed. When services stopped for Beth, Susan, and Zoe they expected more conversations with the agency about the implications of the contract change and further information provided on what other options were available. Susan said, “*I think [the agency] actually should have offered to talk us through the implications of it all.*” Zoe and Beth elaborated by identifying that they thought there should have been more openness about what supports were and were not available when a service was shut down. Beth's words summed up this sentiment: “*To be able to have that opportunity to go somewhere else and just being given some information but to just be left and floundered.*”

Tina reflected on the issues of agency openness and accountability in the context of the relationship she had with the community agency practitioner,

I think [the community agency] should have rung us personally because you have a caseworker; you trust these people to help you when you need help... you feel totally like you're out there on your own doing something you've never done before and it's bloody daunting.

Tina's words underscored how the lack of information available was sometimes reflected in the relationship held with the practitioner. When this information was not available, this experience was isolating. Concurring with Tina, Hannah noted that a lack of information meant she was "a bit lost" as she thought there should have been better information provided to her about who she could contact for support when dealing with multiple agencies.

All the participants spoke about their experiences of asking for information from community agencies when changes were occurring. Participants expressed a variety of views, depending on the availability of information provided. Martha described the importance of receiving information as "amazing" and that any information which advised of changes "brightens" her day because of the transparency the agency exhibited when they shared information. For Martha, the importance of agency transparency about upcoming policy changes drove Martha's reaction to this experience.

Contrasting these experiences, Beth and Hannah spoke about their wish for more information when contract changes occurred. Beth disclosed how she sought advice from the community agency on what other supports were available but the agency provided no information. Zoe, who shared a similar experience, said these sorts of situations were "difficult" because of the lack of support provided. Jackie contextualised these feelings by stating that the agency led her to believe the transition between agencies to get the same support would be "seamless", so a lack of information had a significant impact on what she had expected would occur compared to what she experienced. However, Jackie confirmed this did not come as a surprise, "But now that I'm doing the extra work, I think the extra work is what I would have expected it to be."

Notions of agency accountability during contract changes were also connected to expectations around agency foresight and planning for their clients. Jackie commented that the community agency did not plan for the change once it was known and that this meant it had a bigger impact on her life. She mused, "It probably would have been easier if they had actually just made it really clear that we had a deadline and that you had to make a decision quicker." This feeling and the expectation of the agency was irrespective of what the agency already knew. In Jackie's eyes, there was an expectation that both community agencies involved were accountable for the situation and the shortcomings in the transition process. Hannah elaborated on this further when she claimed that her search for information on whom

to speak to resulted in a lack of answers and accountability from those involved. She said, “*When I asked one agency, they say ‘That’s the other person’s job’, but when I ask that person, they don’t know anything about it.*” This lack of information reflected an absence of agency ownership that participants experienced. Because of these experiences, participants’ accounts of contract changes highlighted their frustration with poor communication when change occurred.

When participants spoke about how they came to know a contract had changed, responses varied between participants whether this occurred via email or in-person. Most participants had learnt about the contract change directly from the community agency while others became aware through their own caregiver support networks. Tina explained that she found out by email:

No, that was it [laughs]. Yeah, that was it. I didn’t know apart from [the email]... ‘cause I got an email prior to that... they just explained, “This email is to let you know that the transition to the new [provider] is progressing”.

Tina later spoke about how this made her feel and how she recognised she had expected “*a bit much*” and would have preferred to have a “*more personal*” response rather than the email. In contrast Susan thought that learning about the change through an email was a non-issue but she thought it could have provided more information, stating: “*I think the email was fine, but I do think there should have been a follow-up... The email... virtually says, ‘Sorry about that’.*”

Clarifying her own feelings, Jackie observed that the difficulty with the experience was not the way it was communicated but the information itself,

I think it was just that we needed that [communication for] clarity of the need for speed... I mean I don’t even know if they knew [the service was shutting down], but I feel like they should have known, ‘cause they were the ones closing down.

In this context, Jackie relied on information about the deadlines required for her to submit new paperwork so that she could receive support from a new community agency. Overall, these experiences reflected that the medium of communication was less important than the information agencies gave to caregivers. For participants, they advised it was more important that information was clear and empathetic to caregivers’ situation.

The way participants received communication did not always bring clarity on why the contract change had occurred. Beth recognised that the practitioner's vague responses to her queries could have been due to the practitioner's lack of information about the contract change itself,

And I've got to take into consideration that the counsellor that I spoke to might not have had all of the information about why the funding was cut at that particular time... I understood it was that they didn't get the contract from the government.

Despite this, Beth affirmed that the practitioner should have still provided some information and clarity as this experience left her feeling “*floundered*”. Beth's words reflected her ambiguity about why a contract had changed but also awareness that it may have stemmed from a contracting decision made by a government department. Beth only discovered this about her contract change after the service had shut down. Similarly, Hannah was confused after being advised the contract had changed as she understood agency services to be a “*package deal*” and were not split based on individual contracts. For Hannah, realising an individual contract could be lost was a confusing experience because of the belief held about how agency contracts work.

This section captures how participants acknowledged contract changes and the way they received communication about contract changes. Participants often appeared uncertain due to the provision of limited information. For participants, the caregiver-practitioner relationship also became a source of information and guidance as they navigated their contract change experience.

The Importance of the Caregiver-Practitioner Relationship

Most participants highly valued the caregiver-practitioner relationship when reflecting on contract changes. Susan placed more importance on who the practitioner was that she engaged with, rather than being aware of the changes in contract funding occurring in the background. Concurring with this, Jackie described practitioners as “*competent and trustworthy*”. Beth, explaining the importance of the relationship, noted,

[Practitioners] are our gods. You don't have all the answers, but you've given us guidance and it's a bit of a balance... We don't have all of the answers and we need to be reassured that we're getting the right information and the right support and if we don't get that, it's quite devastating.

For Sarah, the role of the practitioner was central to not only stability but also to the type of service she received,

[The practitioner] just left it until – she didn't mind... until I could get the funding. She knew that I could access the funding. [The practitioner] didn't mind doing [the service] and just waiting for the payment to go through. I mean not many [practitioners] are going to do that.

Sarah's experience highlighted that some practitioners would waive funding confirmation so that the support needs of their clients can continue to be met without disruption.

Reflecting on the caregiver-practitioner relationship and the flow of information, participants' accounts contrasted when speaking of whom they expected to provide this information. Beth understood the responsibility of communicating changes sat with the practitioner, *"As much as it must have been devastating for that [practitioner] to tell me about the funding being cut, they should have found some information and given some information to proceed on. That would have been helpful."* However, Susan indicated this responsibility sat with the community agency, *"I don't think [the practitioner] wasn't involved in the actual [agency], running the [agency]. But yeah, in that sense, actually getting something from the actual [agency] people would have been good."* Tina agreed but added the government department overseeing the contract bore some responsibility for communicating what could be expected during the contract change.

Where the relationship with the practitioner was lost due to a contract change, Jackie and Tina emphasised the importance of the client-practitioner relationship. Jackie shared, *"There's definitely something about having consistent people who can see things through."* Jackie went on to comment how disruptive she had found changes in practitioners, emphasising that consistency was crucial during various changes, including contract changes. In a similar vein, Tina spoke about the caregiver-practitioner relationship as key to how she felt about the contract change. Tina observed that she felt the change of community agency providing the contract was initially a bad thing because of losing the existing good relationship she had with the practitioner,

Our caseworker... she was just brilliant that first couple of years... We built up a rapport so it was a shame. I think she was sad, like I felt like she was sad. Whether she was losing her job or not, I don't know... And then we switched into [the new community agency] and... I probably spoke to two or three different people in the first year. We weren't assigned anybody, the personal side was gone, but now I don't expect that.

Tina's words reflected how the loss of the caregiver-practitioner relationship as a result of the contract change impacted Tina's view of the situation. Tina's words also emphasised how she still found the practitioner relationship important in establishing her connection with the new contracted agency.

Despite their varied experiences, the caregiver-practitioner relationship was a key component in how participants processed and understood contract changes. For participants, the positive elements of these relationships formed a source of communication and support, while also shaping how participants viewed contract changes knowing the change would result in the loss of the relationship

Caregiver Proactivity When Contracts Change

Experiences of contract changes led to some participants acting proactively and facilitating their own interagency communication because of disorganisation between agencies themselves. Hannah, Jackie, and Martha organised meetings with practitioners to coordinate the services involved. They spoke about their experiences of having to foster this form of interagency interaction. Martha described avoiding dealing with multiple agencies. She explained, *“I demanded they all get on together. I demanded that the information get shared. It is not your information; it is my information.”* Reflecting on this, Martha justified her attitude of demanding interagency co-operation as necessary due to the perception that agencies should be focused on supporting families rather than their own internal agency dynamics. Similarly, Jackie noted how these sorts of interagency dynamics and lack of communication resulted in her proactively developing the plan that would ensure a smooth transition of services, rather than waiting on the agency to coordinate the transition.

Hannah reflected on the process of managing interagency communication during changes. She explained that practitioners’ meetings were *“stressful”* and appeared to think that agencies found her *“slightly annoying.”* For Hannah, who found herself organising an interagency meeting, the meeting’s purpose was to, *“Figure out who’s meant to be doing that, who allocates what, what’s the timeframe, and if that doesn’t happen, what’s the 0800 number; if there’s an 0800 number.”* Participant experiences highlight a common trend of either proactively managing interagency communication to avoid difficulty or experiencing difficulty despite efforts to prevent it. These experiences emerged from uncertainty and created feelings of frustration. Consequently participants adapted and sought their own supports when they found agencies unreliable.

When speaking on how they responded to contract changes, participants were unanimous in their word choice when describing the action they thought necessary to ensure they could receive ongoing support. Beth and Martha spoke of having to *“chase”* or *“fight”* for the support they needed to receive. Supplementing this, Tina added that you either *“wait”* for the support or *“you keep pushing”*. In

explaining why caregivers believed this was necessary, participants shared their frustration with the lack of action exhibited by the practitioners supporting them. Jackie summarised, “*Now I just feel like everybody’s kind of chasing their tail a bit, and yeah, kind of leaving it up to me to organise.*”

For some participants, taking action to find the right information meant receiving support from the same agency. For others, this meant doing their own research. Beth explained, “*I learnt a lot from Google. Google was my friend.*” Martha similarly noted that information would come via her own research on Google as opposed to being advised by the community agency itself. For Martha, this brought positive change by making her aware of newly available contract funding. However, for Beth, while her own research made her aware of other available services, she found the information was out-of-date and that the service was no longer available due to the loss of funding.

Participants explained the importance of self-advocacy and responsibility during these experiences. Zoe emphasised she had responsibility for finding her own supports and that she did not need to be as reliant on agencies:

Yeah, [not getting the support] was a bit disappointing, but it wasn’t the end all, it was like I had other options and, at the end of the day, it’s my responsibility to sort myself out. I’m not reliant on these agencies like I might have been in the past.

Tina echoed this sentiment. Following the change of community agency she experienced and the ways in which her interactions with the agency changed, Tina reflected,

Maybe the way I interacted with [the community agency] changed and that was good, because I now proactively research what I want... the more you can do yourself, the less interaction you can have with [the community agency], the better.

Tina’s words were similar to others’ views that a sense of self-advocacy is needed in dealing with contract changes.

Participants’ experiences demonstrated the proactive steps taken to ensure participants received the support they needed. Participants’ frustration with lack of guidance and support from agencies often led to a sense of self-advocacy, resilience, and self-reliance in seeking information. While participants found solutions such as these, their hopes and goals often centred on how agencies should improve in their communication and support for caregivers.

Providing Feedback to Agencies

Participants emphasised finding their own ways to make their voices heard when they were unsatisfied with the way contract changes had occurred. When participants discussed this option, some spoke of giving feedback while others viewed it as making a complaint. For most of the participants, there was apprehension about seeking to provide feedback on how the changes had impacted them, regardless of the severity the impact had on the participant's life. Tina described this as not wanting to “*go down the rabbit hole*” of voicing her concerns. Martha, who did make a complaint about the way in which a contract change had been handled, confessed, “*I've made many complaints. I've said how it changed our lives, how it stressed our lives out.*”

Other participants talked about the desire to give feedback due to the impact the contract change had on their lives. Jackie then explained despite this desire she was hesitant to give feedback due to the emotional impact of the contract change,

Providing feedback is doing it in the right tone of voice... and doing it at the time when I'm not quite stressed about it all... 'cause all of this, I guess my initial reactions, I'm saying I came across as bolshie, it's like, this wouldn't go out to [the community agency].

Jackie's comments reflected the emotional impact of the contract change and that while she would have liked to have provided feedback, the impact of the changes impeded on her ability to express her concerns in the way she desired.

Participants were also uncertain where to direct feedback. Susan said she was happy to speak to the practitioners who delivered the service but did not know how to provide feedback to the community agency. Asked if she felt she could provide feedback, Susan mused, “*Not to [agency name] themselves. [Practitioner name] was really a great person, but she wasn't [agency name] as such... actually getting something from the actual [agency name] people would have been good.*” This sentiment was shared by other participants not knowing where to send a complaint even if they wanted to make one.

Participants identified a range of feelings about providing feedback or making a complaint when they were unsatisfied with the service they received or wanted to voice how a contract change had impacted them. While these feelings were strong for participants, there was often apprehension or uncertainty about the right time, place, or audience for their voice to be heard. A key driver in caregivers' desire to provide feedback was the recognition that needs persist when contracts do not.

Most of the participants spoke about their hope for change in the way contracts change for community agencies due to the impact the changes had on their own lives. Participants explained how they would like to be listened to but also how they thought both community agencies and government departments should respond. Martha described a desire to “*be heard and respected*”. This sentiment was shared by most participants who also acknowledged the importance of research and open communication from those making procurement decisions so that better services can be delivered to caregivers. Tina explained, “*Government needs to hear every facet from foster carers to deliver better services... it’s involved a lot of people along the way... and there’s been a lot of frustration... Our voice needs to be heard.*” For Tina, these feelings stemmed from a sense that the contract did not need to change in the first place had there been a form of consultation with clients prior to the contract change occurring.

Although participants were clear about their desire to be consulted, several caregivers added in their commentary that they expected community agencies to be proactive in the conversation about engaging with caregivers in this process. Beth stressed clients “*need a follow up*” and that agencies should be open with their communication so that, in Susan’s words, clients felt as though “*we’re not just dropped.*” Echoing this desire, Jackie emphasised that community agencies should be more timely and “*pushy*” in their communication about a contract changing.

Participants articulated a need to be heard but their hopes for change were often hindered by the limited opportunities available to express their views when speaking with agencies. As a result, participants clearly identified a desire for engagement, to be heard and respected, but still expressed uncertainty about how they could express themselves.

Chapter Summary

The findings presented in this chapter drew on the eight participants’ understanding of procurement processes, their own experiences of contracts, and the individual impact of contract changes. Participants identified the complexities they faced as caregivers both during and independent of contract changes. Participants were also empathetic to the impact changes had on community agencies and their staff, highlighting the important role of the client-practitioner relationship. Reflecting on change, participants emphasised their own role in self-advocacy when community agencies became unreliable due to contract limitations and alterations. Alongside this, participants also identified their need to be heard in contract decision-making and the impact they felt when opportunity to provide feedback was lacking. The next chapter addresses how these findings connect to the broader literature and the research aims.

Chapter Six: Discussion

This research aims to explore how caregiver clients of State-funded community child and family services are impacted when contract changes result in a change of service for the client. This chapter discusses and analyses the research findings through a critical realist lens. This approach explores the causal mechanisms, the environmental structures, which both impact participants' lives and are, in turn, subject to the interpretation of each participant's experiences. This chapter is thus divided based on the identified mechanisms, through which participants' experiences are discussed and the mechanism is analysed. The mechanisms of neoliberalism, with a focus on the current procurement model and accountability structures, are analysed in this chapter by considering their impact on the issues of complexity, contracting priorities, client engagement, and client voices. By adopting this theoretical approach, the experience of undergoing a contract change is validated by placing the participant's voice at the centre of interpretation while also recognising the objective and very real impact contract changes have on clients.

Defining the causal mechanisms

As discussed in Chapter Four, the theoretical perspective adopted in this research draws on critical realist theory. Critical realism is premised on the notion that structures (causal mechanisms) operate in an objective reality separate from individuals and thus impact people's individual experiences (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018; Eastwood et al., 2014). Since causal mechanisms emerge within their own social and political contexts, it is important to identify what elements constitute the causal mechanisms within this research (Eastwood et al., 2014). While a predominant mechanism identified within the research is the neoliberal influence on procurement theory within social services, other mechanisms have emerged from this system, such as the structures of agency accountability and contract priorities, are identified throughout this chapter as each theme is addressed. Acknowledging that critical realism melds the subjective-objective divide of reality¹⁵ (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Punch, 2016), the analytical approach adopted in this chapter allows participants' experiences to be critiqued within the social context of the literature while recognising that participants each had their own experience and interpretation of contract change. This two-fold approach permits the interpretation of the causal mechanisms through the participants' experiences.

¹⁵ See Chapter Four, pages 30-31

The State's Inability to Contract Complexity

A tenet of the neoliberal approach to social service procurement is the use of contracts and performance indicators to permit community agencies to fulfil contracted State roles while remaining accountable to the State for contract performance (Grey et al., 2015; Nowland-Foreman, 2016). The overreliance on the use of performance indicators within contracting due to misaligned goals between the State and community agencies has disastrous consequences, such as the centralising of contract decisions within the State to exert control over community agencies (Brown et al., 2016; Cribb, 2006b).¹⁶ As clients' lives are inherently complex within a social service setting, the State requires solutions that accommodate each individual's complex circumstances, a tenet of complexity theory (Butler et al., 2017; Moore & Moore, 2015; Oakden et al., 2021).¹⁷ Participants in this study acknowledged the existing complexity in their lives, presenting this as a central issue, and highlighted the complex demands placed on them as caregivers receiving support from community agencies. While these issues are important, they are also difficult to define in a social service procurement setting, thus clients' complex needs are reduced to contract performance outcomes as the State reverts to the agency theory principle of community agency accountability (Cribb, 2006b; McCue & Prier, 2008; Stace & Cumming, 2006). This arrangement can lead to poor contract outcomes, resulting in a situation where a contract can become overly defined to the point of ignoring clients' daily complex experiences (Moore, 2019; Peat & Costley, 2001), reflecting the lived experience of participants in this study.

Complexity is experienced individually, thus must be defined as a unique experience as posited in complexity theory (Onyx et al., 2010; Sawyers, 2016; Schmid, 2003). Therefore, how complexity is defined for each participant becomes the initial issue procurement decisions must face in order to meet the needs of intended clients of contracted services (Oakden et al., 2021). Beth noted this when she commented how caregiving had changed her life and she experienced uncertainty about what sorts of supports she required for her own unique situation. However, attempting to define the individual needs of clients becomes increasingly difficult when dealing with families and children due to the range of perspectives and issues that need to be addressed for all parties (Moore, 2019). Since complexity is then experienced individually, it is only when the individuals concerned define what complexity means for themselves, as Beth identified, that services can best meet their needs (Boulton et al., 2018). However, this runs antithetical to agency theory principles which state that a misalignment of information between parties will result in the State exerting power to enforce contract control (Cribb, 2006b; Peat & Costley, 2001). When these procurement issues are not addressed resulting in increased State oversight of contracts, participants' definition of complexity is left unheard and overlooked in the contracting

¹⁶ See Chapter Three, pages 25-27

¹⁷ See Chapter Two, pages 13-15

process, as identified by Martha when she reflected on the hardship her family experienced because of the limited supports available that did not meet her family's complex needs.

Neoliberal Contracting Priorities

Where neoliberalism impacts on contracting priorities, the capacity for community agency advocacy of clients is limited, resulting in uncertainty about the degree to which practitioners can advocate for their clients (Levine, 2009; Mosley, 2012; Onyx et al., 2010; Renau, 2021). This system of uncertainty is fuelled by the constraints neoliberalism places on contracted agencies regarding accountability and performance measures whereby meeting contracting requirements becomes the central focus of agency behaviour rather than meeting clients' needs (Cordery, 2012b; Lindberg & Nordin, 2008).¹⁸ This behaviour reflects the notion that community agencies will act in a self-interested manner and thus must be constrained by contracts in order to maintain performance accountability (Grey & Sedgwick, 2015; Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Lamothe, 2015). In agreement with this, participants' experiences of support they received were shaped by the loss of support from community agencies when contract changes occurred. To compensate this loss of support, participants often found ways to adapt and build their own supports when they received limited advocacy from practitioners, an issue highlighted as a result of the existing neoliberal approach to social service procurement which encourages competition (Brodkin, 1997; Yan et al., 2017). These client approaches included various forms of self-advocacy, including but not limited to hosting interagency practitioners' meetings to seeking support elsewhere; however, participants also encountered challenges within the neoliberal context when confronted by community agencies' neoliberal priorities.

Interagency Dynamics

A manifestation of the competing contracting priorities emerges when multiple agencies are involved and contracted to support a single family (Boon et al., 2017; Butler et al., 2017). This arrangement can result in several difficulties for families. For example, close communication and co-ordination between agencies is required when dealing with families who experience complex needs. One participant reflected the importance of this when she spoke about interagency cooperation resulting in better outcomes than when agencies withheld information from one another. However, due to the competitive elements of agency theory-based procurement theory, this interagency communication needs to be encouraged as good practice to avoid poor relationships between community agencies that are normatively inclined to act in competitive ways by not sharing information (Butler et al., 2017; Collins-Camargo et al., 2011; Cordery, 2012a, 2012b; Döbl & Ross, 2013; Munford & Sanders, 2001; Peat &

¹⁸ See Chapter One, page 5

Costley, 2001; Schwartz, 2005; Strier, 2019). These interagency dynamics also reflect a lack of partnership in community agency behaviour, indicating the impact neoliberal models of procurement have on community agencies (Schillemans & Bjurström, 2020). Additionally, the issue of information ownership comes to the fore when dealing with multiple agencies. Issues of agencies withholding information from each other stems from the competitive neoliberal environment community agencies currently operate in where there is an asymmetry of information between agencies coupled with a reluctance to rectify that asymmetry (Cribb, 2006a; Lamothe, 2015). For participants, this lack of interagency cooperation became a source of frustration due to the impact it had on service delivery in meeting their own needs. Exacerbating this issue for participants, the lack of interagency cooperation became more stressful due to the clear need for cooperation when a contract change occurs (Peat & Costley, 2001).

Interagency collaboration during contract changes, such as information sharing, is crucial to the change process experienced by both the agencies involved as well as clients (Collins-Camargo et al., 2011; Döbl & Ross, 2013; Onyx et al., 2010; Peat & Costley, 2001), a perspective shared by the participants in this research. An extension of multi-agency issues emerged for participants when there was a lack of communication and information between agencies when contract changes occurred. As the marketisation of social service contracting results in competition between agencies and deters cooperation (Came et al., 2018; Cordery, 2012b), this became a frustration for participants. For example, participants identified communication breakdown between agencies during contract changes as a source of personal vexation, an issue caused by the neoliberal procurement model (Butler et al., 2017; Coffey, 2018). For Susan, this breakdown resulted in additional requirements placed on her, becoming a source of strain and uncertainty. Participants' experiences highlighted that while the premises of neoliberalism guide competitive behaviour, agencies' behaviour often results in poorer outcomes for clients. This aligned with the concern that the competitive nature of a neoliberal procurement approach, epitomised by the agency theory principle of self-interest, actually result in clients' needs being unmet (Butler et al., 2017).¹⁹

Agencies within the current neoliberal procurement model often become unwillingly bound by their contracting priorities (ANGOA, 2012; Levine, 2009). Hence, while interagency communication and co-operation is a key aspect to ensuring a successful change in support when there is a contract change, the current neoliberal procurement model inhibits this communication and cooperation from occurring. Participants who found themselves caught up in this predicament often turned to their own resources

¹⁹ See Chapter Two, page 11

and developed a form of self-advocacy, an identified client approach as a result of adverse agency experiences (Yan et al., 2017).

Self-Advocacy

As accountability measures and competing neoliberal priorities, products of neoliberalism, increase within community agencies, clients become more inclined to self-advocate for their own needs in response (Kissane, 2010; Yan et al., 2017). Within the data, this emerged due to participants' sentiment that community agencies were becoming less reliable due to a loss of community agency advocacy and support. This loss developed within the context of government transfer of responsibility and risk to contracted agencies, a common issue within the current procurement model and a central issue within contracting practice (Cordery, 2017; Macfarlane, 2017; Munford & Sanders, 2001; Schwartz, 2005).²⁰ While the literature commented on the ways in which government transfers this responsibility to community agencies, participants' experiences reflected how this responsibility transfer also flowed on to clients and their perception of the situation. Since transfer of responsibility is tied to an increase of neoliberal performance measures to ensure accountability (Cordery, 2017), clients are directly adversely impacted by the loss of advocacy clients receive from agencies.²¹ Exacerbating this predicament, stakeholders which advocate for greater client voices, such as the Productivity Commission, also tend to view clients as passive recipients of services (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2015; Sawyers, 2016). Participants who experienced this loss of advocacy and lack of engagement opted for forms of self-advocacy, adopting a sense of responsibility for their own supports rather than relying on agencies. This idea contradicts the responsibility transfer which contracting attempts to achieve but it is reflective of the tendency clients embrace to self-advocate when they lose support in a neoliberal procurement context.

Within this section, the issues of neoliberalism's impact on community agencies have an effect for the outworking of interagency dynamics and the flow of accountability which occurs between the State, community agencies, and clients. These issues come from the dominance of agency theory-based procurement practice within the social sector. As community agencies shift their priority towards their contracting requirements, clients actively engage with various forms of self-advocacy, establishing their own forms of agency accountability to ensure they received the support they needed. As will be explored in the next section, clients' reactions to neoliberal influences become more nuanced when considering the client-practitioner relationship.

²⁰ See Chapter Two, page 16

²¹ See Chapter One, page 4

Client Engagement in a Neoliberal Context

Clients experiencing contract changes are likely to have varying experiences depending on the nature of the client-practitioner relationship (Steen & Smith, 2011). The client-practitioner relationship is at the centre of service delivery and meeting clients' needs, therefore, this relationship is core to how supported clients feel (Döbl & Ross, 2013; Moore, 2019; Oakden et al., 2021; Washington et al., 2009). Client engagement within a neoliberal procurement context is strained and impacts on the accountability of information and the kinds of support clients receive (King, 2021; Weir, 2009). This section identifies how these issues were at the fore of participants' experiences, the ways in which neoliberalism impacted on the client-practitioner relationship, and participants' perception of client engagement.

Accountability to Clients

Accountability is identified as a central tenet of contracting in a neoliberal procurement context which is based on agency theory principles but it is often placed within the context of community agencies being accountable to government departments with whom they have contracts rather than the clients themselves (Macfarlane, 2017; Weir, 2009).²² Thus, clients are situated outside of the accountability structure altogether (Weir, 2009) which became a source of frustration for participants who identified the need for transparency and accountability of information. These experiences were situated within the neoliberal procurement context which posits that clients should be outside of the decision-making process as passive recipients of services (Aimers & Walker, 2016; Coffey, 2018; Döbl & Ross, 2013; New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2015; Sawyers, 2016). Challenging this notion, most participants identified a sense that community agencies should be accountable to clients, particularly within the context of the outsized impact community agencies have on participants' lives. Part of this divergence of opinions on accountability and engagement stems from the transfer of responsibility discussed earlier in this chapter, whereby responsibility is transferred to clients but community agency accountability is not (Brodkin, 1997). Since community agencies are given this responsibility, participants highlighted that agencies needed to be accountable for their actions according to participants' needs, rather than the needs of the contracts held by agencies. This is highlighted in wider literature which identifies the need for a more balanced level of engagement between clients and practitioners, so that clients are treated with more respect and transparency in their interactions with agencies (Aimers & Walker, 2008a; Brodkin, 1997; Butcher, 2014).

The client-practitioner relationship is impacted by the lack of information disclosure, particularly during times of change, which causes stress for the practitioner (Kim & Stoner, 2008; King, 2021). Participants

²² See Chapter Three, pages 25-26

identified struggles to obtain clear answers from both government departments' and community agencies' practitioners when funding changes were occurring. Difficulties in clients obtaining information from agencies is driven by the redirection of agencies' focus from clients' needs towards the needs of contracts (Renau, 2021; Sawyers, 2016). However, additional stress is placed on community agencies when there is contract uncertainty (Stott, 2015). These dynamics shed light on participants' comments that practitioners seemed less willing to divulge support when there was a contract change. As discussed in the previous paragraph, this predicament is contextualised and reinforced within the exclusion of clients from information and decision-making.

Within the context of limitations placed on how community agencies can provide support, clients are also aware of community agencies' contractual and financial constraints within the current procurement context (Kissane, 2010). For participants, while they expressed frustration at the scarcity of information from agencies and practitioners, some participants were also acutely aware of the constraints and limitations placed on agencies and their employees that caused the shift in focus towards meeting government contracts, rather than clients' needs. Considering this, the context of accountability that practitioners face highlights how the agency theory-based accountability structure fails to meet the needs of clients, particularly during contract changes. Nonetheless, participants' accounts signal an awareness of the neoliberal accountability and performance requirements, allowing participants to engage within these constraints by empathising with practitioners. This distinction between practitioners and the contracts they are bound to is a topic which participants explored in further detail, and which was core to the ways participants understood the contract change process.

Client-Practitioner Relationship Instability

For participants and within literature, contract changes were seen as a source of instability for clients (Bunger et al., 2016; Jim, 1998; Johnston & Romzek, 2008; Washington et al., 2009). An example of this for participants was the loss of the client-practitioner relationship, often seen as a source of stability, because of a contract change. The client-practitioner relationship is central to a client's experience of engagement with the community agency and how the client receives support (Jim, 1998; Steen & Smith, 2011). For participants, this was reflected in the importance of the client-practitioner relationship in their lives as well as the impact of losing the relationship when a contract changed. Complementing this, the client-practitioner relationship is also important to how practitioners feel about their job to the extent that contracting requirements which detract from client engagement adversely affect practitioners' job satisfaction (Washington et al., 2009). Hence, both clients and practitioners are not only environmentally drawn to establishing a positive client-practitioner relationship but are also adversely affected by factors which impact on the relationship's quality.

Relational instability, however, is not only caused by a contract change but is a product of the wider strains placed on practitioners during change. Since community agencies operate under State-funded contracts based on neoliberal agency theory principles, agencies are required to meet accountability measures to assure the State they are complying with legal and other contractual requirements (Cordery, 2012b; Sawyers, 2016). Given contractual requirements do not operate according to the complex needs of clients, at times, agencies find themselves prioritising the contractual requirements over the unique circumstances of the client (Döbl & Ross, 2013; Mosley, 2012). Participants' difficult experiences navigating changes with community agencies provide insight into how this type of accountability can hamper the support clients need rather than be provided to suit the client's needs. An attributable reason for participants' experiences is the ways in which community agencies will compromise their organisational values when prioritising contractual needs (Aimers & Walker, 2016; International Federation of Social Workers, 2014; Moore, 2019; Price & Kelly, 2021). Thus, clients' experiences of instability are contextualised within both the neoliberal influences on procurement practice and the organisational changes practitioners experience when the client-practitioner relationship experiences this type of stress.

Instability can also result in increased agency co-operation to clients' benefit and an increase in client advocacy (Collins-Camargo et al., 2011; Onyx et al., 2010). In this context, advocacy emerges within the neoliberal context in which community agencies are located; however, it is placed under strain by the contractual environment (Mosley, 2012; Renau, 2021). Because of this, some participants spoke about demanding advocacy from practitioners in response to the complex array of supports they required. This demand for advocacy, an expression of their rights as clients, is a product of recognising the need for stronger client voices in decision-making and client frustration with an imbalance of power (Carnochan & Austin, 2015; Gummer, 1979). This shows that while practitioners may believe the opportunity for advocacy is limited within the current procurement model, the resilience of participants can heavily influence the outcome and emphasises the active role clients have in engaging with contracted community agencies.

Within contracting, community agencies have identified that clients feel ignored in the contracting decision-making process (Grey et al., 2015; Sawyers, 2016), thus highlighting the power imbalance between the State and community agencies. Participants were more aware of these limitations placed on practitioners and sought to empathise with them when they were aware of the contracting situation, reflecting participants' awareness of the underlying procurement mechanisms which limit community agencies' support. Client empathy with agencies' limitations also extends to the social sector in general,

where clients are aware of the difficult financial situation within which contracted community agencies are located (Kissane, 2010). Participants' empathy highlighted the relational significance of the support they were receiving and their awareness of the wider systemic structures which limited available support. Where the client-practitioner relationship has been found to be an indicator of job satisfaction for practitioners (Washington et al., 2009), the research findings here reflected a reciprocity in this sentiment, identifying the importance of the relationship for the client (Jim, 1998). Hence, while job satisfaction for practitioners is framed within the context of neoliberal contract restrictions, such as performance measure and limited funding, there is also the countering element in the form of the active relationship with the client.

Systemic Exclusion of Client Voices

Both international and New Zealand literature highlighted the commonality of clients being excluded from contract decision-making (Aimers & Walker, 2008b; Aimers & Walker, 2016; Boon et al., 2017; Döbl & Ross, 2013; Johnston & Romzek, 2008; King, 2021; LeRoux, 2009; Macfarlane, 2017; Peat & Costley, 2001; Price & Kelly, 2021; Sawyers, 2016; Steen & Smith, 2011). Such exclusion is often contextualised as clients having complex needs which require specific support while remaining passive and separate from the support they receive (Coffey, 2018; King, 2021). Where decision-making is discussed, it is often only considered from practitioners' perspectives (Butler et al., 2017; Price & Kelly, 2021). Correlating with this, participants identified the need for their voices to be heard when speaking about the opportunity to provide feedback to address the lack of client engagement when contracts change. This research highlighted how participants' experiences here were located within the context of a procurement model which limited the value placed on clients' participation in decision-making. Thus, demonstrating the ways in which client need to be provided the opportunity for qualitative, client-centric discussions to occur so that client voices are prioritised (Döbl & Ross, 2013; Sawyers, 2016).

Agencies' priorities and the use of jargon serve as barriers to client engagement in decision-making (Aimers & Walker, 2016; Boon et al., 2017). While participants did not highlight jargon as an issue, the agencies' conflicting priorities strongly inhibited participants' opportunity to voice their own concerns. As discussed earlier in this chapter, these competing priorities emerged due to the influence of neoliberalism on agencies' practices when engaging with clients where contracting requirements are valued over meaningful engagement with clients (Aimers & Walker, 2008b; Coffey, 2018; Renau, 2021). Emphasising this, participants identified that providing feedback would be too cumbersome, indicating a sense of feeling unheard. The duality of participants' desires to be heard but also feeling unable to voice their feedback is reflective of the undervaluing clients experience when seeking to provide feedback or complain about services received (Brodin, 1997).

As community agencies operate as State proxies due to limitations placed on agencies by contracts, agencies become less approachable to clients (Butler et al., 2017; Grey & Sedgwick, 2015; Joy, 1996; Smith & Lipsky, 1993). Participants who highlighted this identified hesitance before voicing their own concerns. Participants' experiences here are contextualised by the contracting arrangements between the State and community agencies, whereby agencies focus on winning contracts and meeting contract requirements, inhibiting community agencies from being able to build trust (Butler et al., 2017; Moore, 2019). By extension of this, an outcome of neoliberal influences, such as the prevalence of agency theory ideas, is that the State and contracted agencies are treated as inherently untrustworthy, thus requiring performance measures to ensure accountability (Oakden et al., 2021). Such an environment highlights how the same neoliberal context both creates client hesitance to voice concerns while fostering a client desire for self-advocacy which often occurs external to the agencies themselves (Brodkin, 1997; Yan et al., 2017). Thus, as the different causal mechanisms (the neoliberal procurement model, accountability, and the structure of competing priorities) identified in this chapter have highlighted, there are multiple systemic elements which impact clients' experiences of contract changes and inhibit opportunities for feedback. However, while these systems seek to improve agency performance, it is clients' perspectives which highlight issues and challenge assumptions of the neoliberal procurement model.

Chapter Summary

The discussion presented in this chapter drew on a critical realist lens to identify the ways in which the existing neoliberal procurement model, accountability structures, and the system of competing priorities operate and interact as causal mechanisms within the lives of the participants. Analysis of the findings, considering the literature, identified that while participants often recognised the impact these mechanisms had on their lives, they sought to challenge where they had the opportunity to do so as outsiders of the contracting process. This included: the capacity to build resilience, to seek information, and self-advocate despite each of the participants' own situations. However, this discussion also highlighted that the existing exclusion of clients from contracting decision-making is a clear issue for participants which is demanding a desire for change to how clients are treated during consultation in relation to contract decisions.

In the next chapter, the study is concluded, key research findings are explored alongside their implications and recommendations.

Chapter Seven – Conclusion

This research aimed to explore how caregiver clients of State-funded community child and family services are impacted when contract changes result in a change of service for the client. Caregivers of children play a pivotal role in supporting children in their care whilst balancing life commitments and engaging with different agencies. By drawing on the Findings (Chapter Five) and Discussion (Chapter Six), this chapter summarises the key findings and implications on current contracting practices and client engagement in contract decision-making. Recommendations are identified which explore how clients' needs can be better supported by procurement practice (the process of contracting), contracted services themselves, and how clients' perspectives can be empowered in contract decision-making. The research limitations are also briefly stated. The chapter ends with a reminder of the importance of client-centric practice in all aspects of procurement practice.

Study Design

The aim of this research was to explore how clients of State-funded community child and family services are impacted when contracts change resulting in a change of service for the client. The aims of this study were to:

- Explore the relational experiences of social service contracting between professionals and clients
- Explore how these contract changes impact client perception and reception of services
- Discuss how client perspectives could be integrated into policy when contract changes occur

These goals were achieved by completing a qualitative-exploratory study utilising semi-structured interviews within a critical realist framework. This methodology enabled the research to explore how clients are impacted by causal mechanism within social service procurement whilst also reflecting on how clients interpret their experiences of contract changes. Due to the wide impact of contract changes on how services are delivered, it was important to understand how these changes impact clients' individual and contextualised experiences (Butler et al., 2017; Grey & Sedgwick, 2015).

Key Findings

Thematic analysis, via the use of abductive reasoning, was used to explore participants' accounts to understand how their experiences were shaped by systemic procurement issues, reflective of the agency theory-based ideas which guide procurement policy (O'Leary, 2014; Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). Using a critical realist framework, the findings were discussed within the context of identified causal mechanisms, namely the neoliberal procurement approach, the structure of competing priorities, and accountability. The key findings are:

1. Neoliberal procurement models underestimate clients' complex needs
2. Accountability structures limit client engagement
3. Community agencies appear unreliable due to contract prioritisation
4. Clients self-advocate within a neoliberal accountability context
5. Client voices are necessary in procurement

Neoliberal procurement models underestimate clients' complex needs

While it is recognised within theory literature that complexity is experienced individually and thus must be defined individually (Sawyers, 2016), underlying the current procurement model is the neoliberal driver of ensuring appropriate public accountability for State funding (Grey et al., 2015; Nowland-Foreman, 2016). Before addressing the experiences of contract changes and their impact on clients, a key finding centred on the disparity between the procurement definition of complexity and the lived definition for participants. The results showed that participants identified their caregiving experience as holding an already significant amount of complexity prior to the occurrence of a contract change. These experiences were unsurprising in the face of the complicated contracting predicament the State must face, whereby it seeks to keep community agencies accountable but in turn confines clients' complexity to accountability and performance measures that community agencies must meet (Butler et al., 2017; Moore & Moore, 2015; Stace & Cumming, 2006). The resulting paradoxical outcome finds that either clients' needs must be simplified to ensure neoliberal accountability of agencies can be defined, or the State must relinquish control of agencies to permit free engagement and support of clients who often have unique needs that differ from family to family (Moore, 2019; Peat & Costley, 2001). While this would allow inclusion of complexity theory principles which emphasise the need to include individual experiences of complexity, it would limit the State's opportunity to maintain the desire for contract accountability (Brown et al., 2016; Oakden et al., 2021). Thus, the impact of neoliberal ideas, such as accountability and the State's reliance on contracting out services, permeates into both the procurement model and the experiences of clients who experience restricted services which fail to account for their own complex needs.

A fascinating complementary finding centred on participants' recognition that community agencies are in a complex contracting predicament as well. Participants identified that they saw the contract restrictions imposed on agencies which inhibited the support they could provide to their clients. This highlighted the knowledge that clients are not unaware of the impact accountability-based contracts have on community agencies (Kissane, 2010). Furthermore, as participants' understanding of these limitations were placed in the context of the client-practitioner relationship, this brought to the fore the significant relational nature of the support clients receive within the broader procurement context (Jim, 1998; Steen & Smith, 2011).

While clients have awareness of agencies' limitations within the neoliberal accountability context, community agencies also tend to act as proxies of the State in the way they operate (Butler et al., 2017; Joy, 1996). This comes about as a result of community agencies being bound by contracts which lead agencies prioritise meeting the State's contracting interests, rather than clients' needs (Grey & Sedgwick, 2015). Where community agencies act in this way due to the neoliberal procurement model, participants expressed uncertainty as to who provides agencies with funding and whether agencies are independent of the State. Driving this uncertainty is the notion of community agencies acting as "third party government" (Joy, 1996, p. 20), whereby agencies are perceived by clients as an extension of the State (Schwartz, 2005). Consequently, and as will be addressed later in this chapter, not only is community agency effectiveness impacted in its support of clients but clients' perception of community agencies shifts in a negative direction.

Considered together, these results suggest that clients of services are acutely aware of not only their own needs but additionally how the procurement model in place, underpinned by neoliberal ideas of self-interest and agency accountability to the State, impacts on the service they receive from community agencies, both in a sympathetic view of agencies but also causing uncertainty for clients. This emphasises the difficult challenge procurement faces when attempting to fit clients within a neoliberal definition of service delivery, ultimately failing to address the very issues clients experience on a regular basis. This results in confusion for clients when they try to understand how funding works because contracts emphasise the role of accountability to the State rather than clients' needs. The implications of this spotlight the need for procurement practices to be adjusted so that clients' individuality is recognised and allowance is made for transparency in an otherwise rigid contracting system which centres on the needs of the State, not those of clients.

Accountability structures limit client engagement

Due to the neoliberal imposition of accountability requirements on community agencies, agencies are prone to compromise organisational values in favour of contracting priorities when those values and contract requirements conflict (Price & Kelly, 2021). For both practitioners and clients, this predicament has a wide effect as the client-practitioner relationship is placed as a source of job satisfaction for practitioners (Washington et al., 2009) as well as being central to service delivery for clients (Jim, 1998; Steen & Smith, 2011). Thus, changes in the relationship brought about due to change in contract results in a negative experience for both parties. As identified by participants and how they perceive the relationship, a change in the relationship can result in uncertainty for clients and impacts clients' experiences of the community agency's service (Aimers & Walker, 2008b; Brodtkin, 1997; Butcher, 2014). Participants' views on this reflected clients' reality that despite the importance of the client-practitioner relationship, neoliberal influences still negatively impact on the support they received and tended to have an outsized negative impact when participants received poor support.

This finding highlighted the disproportionate influence the client-practitioner relationship has on the relational experience of contract changes for clients due to the adverse impact of accountability structures on agencies' practices. As practitioners often serve as gateways to services for clients, the flow of information and support via the practitioner becomes crucial for the client in understanding the support they are receiving and any changes occurring. However, restrictions placed on practitioners by way of neoliberalism's influence overshadows and inhibits the level of support available to clients, impacting the client's perception of the contract change.

Community agencies appear unreliable due to contract prioritisation

When community agencies prioritise meeting contract requirements over clients' needs, the way community agencies interact with clients becomes skewed to the disadvantage of clients, resulting in community agencies appearing unreliable in their ability to advocate (Macfarlane, 2017; Sawyers, 2016). During contract changes, the importance placed on the flow of information stems out of an agency theory-based neoliberal model which emphasises the importance of information gathering for the State but lack of accountability and information for clients when community agency services are contracted to the State (King, 2021; Weir, 2009). The results highlighted a level of uncertainty exacerbated by poor communication from community agencies. Conversely, participants who received good information found this to be a positive experience, suggesting information flow is crucial to the way clients perceive services during times of change. This emerged due to clients being placed outside of the accountability structure (Weir, 2009), thus leaving them reliant on community agencies for clear communication when there were no other information alternatives.

The competitive neoliberal nature of procurement also diminishes agencies' desire to share information with other agencies due to competitive contracting elements, leading to miscommunication and misinformation between community agencies (Boon et al., 2017; Butler et al., 2017; Cribb, 2006b; Lamothe, 2015). As the results found, this dynamic was highly impacted by agencies' inability to cooperate in a way that meets clients' needs. Consequently, the data found that clients must promote this level of interagency co-operation to maintain a certain level of support. Participants' comments suggested the impetus sits with the client when agencies are inhibited by the competitive neoliberal and contract prioritisation environment. While it is known that such interagency communication is needed in the face of neoliberal accountability expectations on agencies (Collins-Camargo et al., 2011), agency behaviour under neoliberalism still results in clients needing to advocate for themselves due to agencies' behaviour (Renau, 2021), causing clients to perceive agencies as unreliable in the level of support provided.

Considering these two facets of support breakdown, clients are troubled by a loss of support when dealing with contract changes. Though community agencies hold information, they are reluctant to disclose it to clients or to other agencies due to the competitive neoliberal and contract prioritisation environment which discourages transparency outside of agencies. As the data suggested, clients were left to their own devices as they confronted dwindling supports from community agencies.

Clients self-advocate within a neoliberal accountability context

As neoliberal influence, in the form of accountability requirements on community agencies, results in a loss of support, client proclivity for self-advocacy increases as client support decreases (Carnochan & Austin, 2015; Gummer, 1979). The results emphasised this when participants shifted away from reliance on agency supports. Remarking on losing supports, participants spoke about an increasing level of self-advocacy in the face of community agencies' unwillingness to provide the support required. Alongside the neoliberal emphasis on accountability to the State which manipulates participants' experiences are agencies' tendencies to encourage client self-advocacy in lieu of community agencies providing the support required (Renau, 2021). Thus, participants were left with an environment which not only reduced the level of support they received but additionally intentionally fostered a level of self-advocacy. This operated in lieu of the support community agencies should be providing to clients whereby client self-advocacy should develop as a result of practitioner advocacy rather than in its absence.

Client voices are necessary in procurement

Procurement practice, based on the State wielding decision-making power, distances clients' voices from decision-making while also enforcing community agencies' accountability to the State (Oakden et al., 2021; Renau, 2021). As a result, client exclusion from decision-making is a known issue within literature (Butler et al., 2017). The results of this study exemplified this where participants, reflecting on their experiences of contract change, often noted the lack of opportunity and empowerment to provide feedback when they had concerns about a contract change. These feelings emanated from a sense of uncertainty about how the agency would respond or wariness of the feedback process. Parallel to this, clients also experienced community agencies as being proxies of the State (Joy, 1996; Schwartz, 2005) prioritising their own contracting needs over clients (Aimers & Walker, 2016), thus having a degree of guardedness concerning community agencies (Butler et al., 2017; Moore, 2019). This environment results in a context where clients are not only excluded from decision-making but also feel unable to adequately express their views. This environment is fuelled by the broad neoliberal and accountability structure mechanisms which influence community agency behaviour, fostering the neglect of client voices in service delivery.

This system which excludes client voices is also contextualised by the double-sided barrier of clients seen as separate from service delivery (Coffey, 2018; King, 2021) and practitioners being thought as the best advocates for clients in contract decision-making (Butler et al., 2017; Price & Kelly, 2021). Instead, clients need to be placed at the centre of decision-making (Coffey, 2018). Participants were acutely aware of this, and while they felt unable to provide feedback, participants still believed their perspectives needed to be accounted for when contracting decisions were made. This was evident from participants who emphasised the desire to be heard by contract decision-makers so that better services could be delivered, rather than losing support without the opportunity to object or challenge the contract decision or broader procurement practice.

Together, these two findings reflected a system which inhibited client input at the service, contract decision-making, and procurement practice levels. Clients were left to feel outside of the sphere of influence and they were very aware of this reality. Recognising that their voices matter, clients sought influence in decision-making and hope for an opportunity to share their perspective and their concerns regarding how neoliberal contract decisions impact their lives.

Implications

The key findings identified here highlight an alarming reality that clients are aware, alert, and largely disrupted by contract changes when they occur. Clients, who deal with complex realities, are often burdened by the additional strain contract change can cause. This impact extended from the professional engagement the client experiences through to the level of support they received, and how the client perceived that support. Considered altogether, the findings painted a picture of clients with an intense desire to be heard and respected where they otherwise were ignored.

The influence of neoliberalism on procurement and social work practice has resulted in a tendency for practitioners to encourage self-advocacy in clients (Renau, 2021). While, at face value, this may align with professional ethics, such as social work values, which encourage client self-determination, the “empowerment and liberation of people” (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014, para. 1), the data highlighted that clients simply did not feel empowered by these practices. That is not to say that clients did not find their own means of empowerment (Brodkin, 1997; Yan et al., 2017) but this should not serve as an excuse for the exclusion of clients from advocacy, recognition of client complexity, clients’ need for appropriate and timely information, or a voice in contract decision-making and general procurement practice. To allow the guise of empowering self-advocacy in lieu of encouraging clients to the decision-making table runs antithetical to the very purpose of client engagement, an already identified need within how procurement is managed within New Zealand (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2015). This is an identified gap that is long overdue for redress.

Limitations

The general application of the research is limited by the small sample size and the varying contractual contexts which participants drew from, making general conclusions limited in scope. However, as identified in the methodology, a critical realist approach seeks to provide the best estimation of a situation, without seeking to claim a final answer, indicating room for further research and exploration of the topic. A further limitation may also be that the self-selection of participants from the Process A Advertisement (Appendix C) relied on potential participants knowing they had experienced a contract change, thus other participants may have self-excluded due to lack of knowledge regarding their own experiences. Despite that, the recruited participants did offer a wide range of experiences to draw from. Lastly, the data may also have been limited as all participants were female caregivers, preventing the opportunity for a mixed-gender perspective of contract changes. That said, the research findings do contribute to knowledge regarding clients’ understanding and perspectives of contract decision-making and would provide proximal similarity, thus being generalisable within a similar population group.

Recommendations

Considering the research findings, five key recommendations emerged from this study:

1. Client support should be tailored according to individual circumstances rather than contract requirements.
 - Current contracting approaches do not fully account for the complex needs that clients face. This results in clients' needs and voices being overlooked when it comes to their own individual support needs. Changing the focus of contracts to allow services to address clients' specific needs would result in better services being delivered to clients.
2. Both the State and community agencies should be more transparent with clients about contracting mechanisms.
 - While clients are aware that the procurement model exists, it is not always clear where contract funding comes from due to clients' lack of knowledge and community agencies acting as State proxies. Transparency would improve client trust in a system which has historically excluded them.
3. Community agencies should operate with client accountability in mind.
 - Within the neoliberal procurement context, community agencies prioritise accountability to the State at the expense of accountability to clients, especially during times of contract changes, when clear communication is paramount for clients. This results in uncertainty and mistrust of services for clients. Re-focusing accountability would improve the interactions clients have with agencies and clients' experience of the contract change process.
4. Community agencies' processes should encourage more regular client feedback.
 - Clients are reluctant and feel unable to voice their concerns when they experience service dissatisfaction, particularly during contract changes. However, clients also expect support from community agencies in providing a means for feedback to occur. This change would result in clients feeling comfortable and supported to express their views without apprehension.
5. More opportunity at the State and community agency levels should be provided for clients to influence contract decision-making so that their voices may be heard.
 - Client exclusion from contract decision-making is a well-documented issue. Clients are also an important stakeholder in contract decision-making due to the impact contract changes have on their lives. Including client voices in decision-making would provide better procurement outcomes for clients of contracted services.

Further Research

The research found that clients, when they have concerns about the support they receive, are often hesitant to express their views for fear of the length of the feedback process or repercussions from giving feedback. This raises significant questions about the environment clients experience where they feel the need to second-guess sharing their perspective on the very support they have been receiving. Further research into this phenomenon would shed light on the systemic constraints clients experience in decision-making, self-advocacy, and providing feedback.

Further research is also needed to explore the research's principal phenomenon, the contract change. As this research drew from a small sample with varied experiences, there would be great benefit from drawing from more perspectives to get a fuller picture of how contract changes impact on clients' experiences of services.

Conclusion

This research aimed to explore how caregiver clients of State-funded community child and family services are impacted when contract changes result in a change of service for the client. This study found that changes in social sector contracts have a significant effect on the lives of caregiver clients, who are fully aware of this impact. A historical challenge to social service procurement has been the balancing of meeting clients' complex needs while the State seeks to uphold neoliberal ideas of agency accountability and performance measures. For clients, this context drastically shapes the type of support they receive and how they perceive both the practitioners and community agencies they encounter. Clients are fixed within this context and their voices are ignored, keeping any contract decision-making out of their control. As the State moves forward to consider the issue of defining client complexity in procurement, the ongoing question of clients' role in contract decision-making must come to the fore. As one participant summarised, *“Government needs to hear every facet from foster carers to deliver better services... it's involved a lot of people along the way... and there's been a lot of frustration... Our voice needs to be heard.”*

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Appendix A: Letter to Organisations

Tēnā koe,

My name is Blake Gardiner and I am a Master of Arts student enrolled in research at Massey University. My research aims to explore client perspectives of child and family service contract changes. I am interested in finding out about the impact of contract changes on clients. I intend to investigate:

- Explore the relational experiences of social service contracting between professionals and clients.
- How these contract changes impact on client perception and reception of services.
- How client perspective could be integrated into policy when contract changes occur.

I intend to conduct up to eight interviews with caregivers/clients. These interviews would most likely occur later this year following ethical approval.

I am making contact as I would like to discuss my research with you. My research is focused on times when contracts have changed and this information is not publicly available. I was wondering:

- Has your organisation had a contract change within the last five years?
- If so, would you consider advertising this research to your client base?

Your organisation would not be named in my thesis and all identifiable client information will be anonymised. This would protect your reputation in the unlikely event clients said anything negative.

I would be more than happy to share my findings with you once the research is complete either in written form or as a presentation to your Board. I have attached my Information Sheet for more information about my research. I am happy to answer any further questions or concerns you may have.

This research has received low-risk ethics approval. It is supervised by Dr Nicky Stanley-Clarke (n.stanley-clarke@massey.ac.nz / 06 356 9099 ext 83515) and Associate Professor Shirley Jülich (s.j.julich@massey.ac.nz / 09 414 0800 ext 43359).

Please get in touch with me if your organisation has had a contract change in the last five years and you would be willing to talk further about the research. My contact details are:

E: blake.gardiner.1@uni.massey.ac.nz

Ngā mihi maioha,

Blake Gardiner

Appendix B: Process A Information Sheet

Client Perspectives When NGO Providers for State-Funded Contracts Change

INFORMATION SHEET

(Process A – Client Participants)

This research seeks to explore the perspectives of clients when the community agency for a service changes. Specifically, the goals of this research are to:

- Explore the relational experiences of social service contracting between professionals and clients.
- Explore how these contract changes impact on client perception and reception of services.
- Discuss how client perspectives could be integrated into policy when contract changes occur.

Since the 1980s, community agencies have been providing government services through different contracts. These contracts mean that community agencies receive government funding to meet certain outcomes while the government still retains the right to decide who holds the contract for the service. These contracted services take the forms of different community programmes, therapies, and other social work services. Since services for clients continue regardless of which community agency holds the contract, clients often interact with multiple agencies over a period of time even though it has been the same contract.

The principal researcher is Blake Gardiner, a Master of Arts (Social Policy) student in the School of Social Work at Massey University in Auckland. I am a registered social worker and have worked in both community and statutory child protection. I also work as a tutor for Massey University in several social policy papers.

The research will involve interviews with up to eight caregivers/clients about their experiences of receiving a service when the community agency delivering the service has changed. These interviews will be 60 to 90 minutes over Zoom at a time convenient to the participant.

If you are a client receiving a service, where the community organisation delivering the service (for example: therapy, family support, or social work support) has changed in the last five years, then I would like to invite you to be interviewed as part of this research.

If you agree to be interviewed, it will involve participating in one interview of approximately 60 to 90 minutes. With your permission the audio from the interviews will be digitally recorded using a mobile phone or online using Zoom (any video recording captured by Zoom will be deleted immediately following the interview). All information will be treated confidentially. The data collected from the project will only be used for completion of this thesis and any subsequent publications.

Your participation in the project would be entirely voluntary and there is no obligation to participate. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time prior to completion of the project; this can be done through contact with the researcher via email at blake.gardiner.1@uni.massey.ac.nz;
- 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;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Participants will receive a \$20 Countdown voucher as a thank you for participating.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, NOR 22/66. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 ext 43347 or humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

This research is supervised by Dr Nicky Stanley-Clarke (n.stanley-clarke@massey.ac.nz) and Associate Professor Shirley Jülich (s.j.julich@massey.ac.nz). If you have concerns, you can contact either myself or the research supervisors.

Please do not hesitate to contact me about any aspect of the research if you are interested in participating. I can be contacted through at blake.gardiner.1@uni.massey.ac.nz.

Thank you for your assistance.

Appendix C: Process A Advertisement



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

Research Invitation

Sometimes when people receive support from a non-government (community) organisation, the organisation providing the service can change. This can happen due to a number of reasons where you may still be receiving the same kind of support, but the agency supporting you changes.

*
My name is Blake Gardiner and I am a student completing my Master of Arts (Social Policy) at Massey University. As part of this qualification, I am undertaking a research project. I am interested in how people are impacted by changes in the support they receive when the organisation providing the support changes.

Have you:

- ⇒ Received child and family support (e.g. social work support, therapy) from a community organisation in the past five years?
- ⇒ Been a client of this support when the community organisation providing the service has changed?

If this is you, I would love to hear your experience!

Interviews will be 60 to 90 minutes and can either occur in-person in Auckland or via Zoom at a time convenient to you.

Participants will receive a \$20 Countdown voucher as a thank you for participating.

If you are interested in participating or have questions, please contact me at blake.gardiner.1@uni.massey.ac.nz

This research has ethics approval from Massey University. If you are interested, I can provide more information.

Appendix D: Process B Advertisement



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

Research Invitation

(Process B – Professional Participants)

Sometimes when people receive support from a non-government (community) organisation, the organisation providing the service can change. This can happen due to a number of reasons where they may still be receiving the same kind of support, but the agency supporting them changes.

*
My name is Blake Gardiner and I am a student completing my Master of Arts (Social Policy) at Massey University. As part of this qualification, I am undertaking a research project. I am interested in how people are impacted by changes in the support they receive when the organisation providing the support changes.

Do you:

- ⇒ Work or have worked for an NGO in the past five years
- ⇒ Work in, or worked in, a role in NGO contracting OR been in a role that has been impacted by a contracting decision.

If this is you, I would love to hear your experience!

Interviews will be 60 to 90 minutes and can either occur in-person in Auckland or via Zoom at a time convenient to you.

Participants will receive a \$20 Countdown voucher as a thank you for participating.

If you are interested in participating or have questions, please contact me at blake.gardiner.1@uni.massey.ac.nz

This research has ethics approval from Massey University. If you are interested, I can provide more information.

Appendix E: Process B Information Sheet

Client Perspectives When NGO Providers for State-Funded Contracts Change

INFORMATION SHEET

(Process B – Professional Participants)

This research seeks to explore the perspectives of clients when the community agency for a service changes. Specifically, the goals of this research are to:

- Explore the relational experiences of social service contracting between professionals and clients.
- Explore how these contract changes impact on client perception and reception of services.
- Discuss how client perspectives could be integrated into policy when contract changes occur.

Since the 1980s, community agencies have been providing government services through different contracts. These contracts mean that community agencies receive government funding to meet certain outcomes while the government still retains the right to decide who holds the contract for the service. These contracted services take the forms of different community programmes, therapies, and other social work services. Since services for clients continue regardless of which community agency holds the contract, clients often interact with multiple agencies over a period of time even though it has been the same contract.

The principal researcher is Blake Gardiner, a Master of Arts (Social Policy) student in the School of Social Work at Massey University in Auckland. I am a registered social worker and have worked in both community and statutory child protection. I also work as a tutor for Massey University in several social policy papers.

The research will involve interviews with up to eight professionals working within the social service sector who have either worked in contracting or supported clients who have experienced a contract change. These interviews will be 60 to 90 minutes over Zoom at a time convenient to the participant.

If you are a social service professional who either works in social service contracting or has supported clients who have experienced a contract change in the last five years, then I would like to invite you to be interviewed as part of this research.

If you agree to be interviewed, it will involve participating in one interview of approximately 60 to 90 minutes. With your permission the audio from the interviews will be digitally recorded using a mobile phone or online using Zoom (any video recording captured by Zoom will be deleted immediately following the interview). All information will be treated confidentially. The data collected from the project will only be used for completion of this thesis and any subsequent publications.

Your participation in the project would be entirely voluntary and there is no obligation to participate. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time prior to completion of the project; this can be done through contact with the researcher via email at blake.gardiner.1@uni.massey.ac.nz;
- 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;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, NOR 22/66. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 ext 43347 or humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

This research is supervised by Dr Nicky Stanley-Clarke (n.stanley-clarke@massey.ac.nz) and Associate Professor Shirley Jülich (s.j.julich@massey.ac.nz). If you have concerns about this research, you can contact myself or the research supervisors.

Please do not hesitate to contact me about any aspect of the research or if you are interested in participating. I can be contacted through at blake.gardiner.1@uni.massey.ac.nz.

Thank you for your assistance.

Appendix F: Consent Form

Client Perspectives When NGO Providers for State-Funded Contracts Change

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded (if the interview occurs via Zoom, the video recording will be deleted immediately following the interview and will not be used for this research).

I request/do not request that my transcript be returned for verification and confirmation prior to be using in the data analysis.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date:

.....

Full Name - printed

.....

Appendix G: Full Ethics Approval Letter



MASSEY
UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHURŌA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

17/11/2022

Dear: Blake Gardiner

Re: Ethics Application - NOR 22/66 - Client Perspectives When NGO Providers for State-Funded Contracts Change

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee:

Human Ethics Northern Committee at their meeting held on **Thursday, 27 October 2022**

On behalf of the Committee 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.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C Johnson', on a light-colored background.

Professor Craig Johnson
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand T 06 951 6841; 06 95106840
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz; animalethics@massey.ac.nz; gtc@massey.ac.nz

Appendix H: Process A - Email to Community Agencies

Tēnā koe [name],

I hope this finds you and your family well.

My name is Blake Gardiner and I am currently doing my Masters research on contracting in the community sector (when Oranga Tamariki provides contracts to community agencies to provide services). My research focus is on the perspectives of clients when the community provider holding a contract changes.

I was in communication earlier this year with your organisation about this research where we discussed the possibility of this research being advertised by [organisation name] on my behalf. My research has now received ethics approval to proceed (attached is confirmation of this).

If it is still agreeable for [organisation name] to advertise my research to your clients, I have attached the Advertisement and Information Sheet for electronic distribution. The Advertisement and Information Sheet provides detailed information about the purpose of this research, criteria for participation, and what would be involved for participants.

If you would like more information about this research before submitting this to your clients, please feel free to contact me via the contact number below.

Please let me know once you have circulated the documents. Thank you for the time and consideration.

Ngā mihi nui,

Blake Gardiner

Appendix I: Process B – Email to Community Agencies

Tēnā koe [name],

I hope this finds you and your family well.

Thank you for the time to advertise my research on my behalf. I am seeking to widen my pool of participants. I would like to seek the perspectives of professionals to better understand how changes in contracting impact social work delivery.

I am making contact with you to request if my research can be circulated to your staff members who work with clients. I have attached my updated Advertisement and Information Sheet for professionals in this email. I have also attached my Consent Sheet as well.

I am available to speak on the phone or over Teams/Zoom if you have any questions prior to sharing this information with your staff.

If this is agreeable, I would appreciate if you would advise when the advertisement has been circulated to your staff.

Thank you for the time and consideration.

Ngā mihi nui,

Blake Gardiner

Appendix J: Process B – Interview Schedule

Process B – Professional Participants

The interviews undertaken will be semi-structured, the type typically used in qualitative research. This interview schedule will be used as a guide to ensure that all areas of interest are captured during this time.

Introduction

Outline purpose of thesis using Information Sheet which includes

- Context to the contracting model
- Current contracting approach that it used in child and family services
- Goals of the study

Issues of informed consent

- If any of the questions make you feel uncomfortable, if you wish to stop the interview at any time or have the recorder switched off, please ask.

Length of interview

- It is anticipated that this interview will be approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Do you have a time limit or anything you wish to make me aware of before we begin?

Background/Rapport (demographics):

1. What is your current role in your organisation?
2. What interested you in participating in this research?
3. How long have you been working for [organisation name]?
4. What do you enjoy about your role?
5. Tell me about the kinds of support you have been involved with in working with families.

Client Understanding of the Service

6. When agencies provide supports to families, they receive funding from government agencies and other donations so that they can provide the support service. Tell me about your understanding of how funding works for community agencies.
7. Tell me about your understanding of how organisations are given funding to deliver services.
8. What is your understanding of how contracts can be changed?
9. When clients were receiving support, were you aware of any opportunity for them to provide feedback on the support they were receiving?
 - a) Tell me about a time you have observed this and how you felt about it at the time.

Client Perception of the Service During Transition

10. When the change of community organisation took place, tell me about your experience of what happened.
 - a) Tell me about an example of this.
 - b) Tell me about any feedback you received from clients during this time.
11. Leading up to and immediately after the change, what changes in the support being provided did notice or did you hear from clients?
 - a) Can you give me some examples?
12. What were your reflections on this process?

Client Perception after the Contract Change

13. After the change of community agency, tell me about how service delivery changed for the clients you were working with?
 - a) Tell me about an example of this.
14. How was the change in provider communicated with you as a professional?
 - a) As far as you were aware, how was the change in provider communicated with clients?
 - b) If the change was communicated, when was it made known the provider had changed?
15. What opportunities were there to offer feedback (for both professionals and clients)?
16. What other consequences of the change did you observe?
17. From this experience, what changes would you want to see in the process, if any?
18. Is there anything else you want to share or clarify about the experience?

Conclusion

19. I want to acknowledge and thank-you for your time and honesty in meeting and discussing these issues.
20. Discussion as to where to from here for the research and the potential outcomes of the research.
21. Do you have any questions for me?
22. I can be contacted at anytime if you wish to discuss or amend anything you have said or withdraw from the research.
23. Pseudonyms and organisations mentioned in this interview will not be used in the final report to ensure participant confidentiality.
24. What interested you in this research?
25. Is there anything further you would like to add?

Appendix K: Process A – Interview Schedule

Process A - Interview Schedule

The interviews undertaken will be semi-structured, the type typically used in qualitative research. This interview schedule will be used as a guide to ensure that all areas of interest are captured during this time.

Introduction

Outline purpose of thesis using Information Sheet which includes

- Context to the contracting model
- Current contracting approach that it used in child and family services
- Goals of the study

Issues of informed consent

- If any of the questions make you feel uncomfortable, if you wish to stop the interview at any time or have the recorder switched off, please ask.

Length of interview

- It is anticipated that this interview will be approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Do you have a time limit or anything you wish to make me aware of before we begin?

Background/Rapport (demographics):

26. Tell me about the kinds of support you have received in the past
27. What did you find valuable with the support you received?
28. What kinds of support were you seeking?

Client Understanding of the Service

29. When agencies provide supports to families, they receive funding from government agencies and other donations so that they can provide the support service. When you were receiving supports from [name of agency/service], were you aware of who was funding the service?

- a) If so, what was your understanding?
- 30. Can you tell me about your understanding of how organisations are given funding to deliver services and that these contracts can be changed?
 - a) If so, how did you feel about this?
 - b) If not, when did you first become aware this could happen?
- 31. When you were receiving support, what were the opportunities to provide feedback back to the NGO about the service
 - a) How did you feel about this?
- 32. While you were receiving services and the organisation providing the service changed – were you aware of this?
- 33. How long had you been receiving services when the community agency providing the services changed?
- 34. How long did you continue to receive services after the change?

Client Perception of the Service During Transition

- 35. When the change of community organisation took place, tell me about your experience of what happened.
 - a) What were the opportunities to provide feedback on the change when it was happening?
 - b) How was this change communicated to you?
 - If it wasn't, when did you first become aware that the provider had changed?
 - c) How did you feel about how it was communicated?
 - d) How did this change impact you?
 - e) What did you think of this process?
 - f) Did you have any concerns about what the change might mean for you?
- 36. Leading up to and immediately after the change, what changes did notice in the support you were receiving?
 - a) Can you give me some examples?
- 37. What did you think about this when it was happening?

Client Perception after the Contract Change

- 38. After the change of community agency, how did the service delivery change for you?
 - a) What were some positive changes?
 - b) What were some negative changes?
- 39. What opportunities were there to offer feedback on the change in provider?
- 40. How long after the change did you continue to receive support?

- a) If you did stop receiving support, tell me about why you made the decision to stop.

Conclusion

41. I want to acknowledge and thank-you for your time and honesty in meeting and discussing these issues.
42. Discussion as to where to from here for the research and the potential outcomes of the research.
43. Do you have any questions for me?
44. I can be contacted at anytime if you wish to discuss or amend anything you have said or withdraw from the research.
45. Pseudonyms and organisations mentioned in this interview will not be used in the final report to ensure participant confidentiality.
46. What interested you in this research?
47. Is there anything further you would like to add?