



NSW legislative council's inquiry into child protection: Response to questions on notice

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Background

On Tuesday 27 September 2016, The Benevolent Society, represented by Ms Dylan Kennedy, Team Leader, Brighter Futures, South West Sydney appeared at the hearing for General Purpose Standing Committee No.2's (Committee) inquiry into Child Protection in New South Wales.

A number of questions were taken on notice at that hearing. This document provides The Benevolent Society's response to those questions on notice.

Response to Questions on Notice

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Ms Kennedy, the last page of the submission from the Benevolent Society talks about the New Zealand actuarial approach. Are you familiar with that and do you want to make comment on it, particularly regarding the last couple of lines that say:

The Benevolent Society encourages exploration of any reforms which seek to extend and improve access to universal services and targeted prevention and intensive support for families, and which directly fund the needs of the children in an attempt to keep them from out of home care where safe to do so.

As our submission notes, The Benevolent Society is interested in new approaches to child protection which are being trialled in other jurisdictions. Presently, New Zealand is introducing a range of reforms to overhaul its child protection system which maybe of interest to the Committee. New Zealand's reforms include the introduction of the *Investing in Children Programme*, formed in April 2016, to lead the implementation of a 'fundamental shift' in New Zealand's child protection system in order to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable children. These reforms include the establishment of a new Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki, which comes into effect on 1 April 2017.ⁱ

The actuarial approach, or investment approach as it is often referred, is one of the six 'foundational building' blocks on which the new system in New Zealand is being founded.ⁱⁱ The full list of foundational building blocks includes:

- A child-centred system
- High aspirations for Maori children
- An investment approach
- Strategic partnerships
- A professional proactive framework and
- Engaging all New Zealanders

According to New Zealand's Ministry of Social Development, the investment approach for vulnerable children will:

Consider a lifetime view of the wellbeing of individual children, and based on consistent and comprehensive actuarial information, intervene early to address factors contributing to child vulnerability and the costs associated with poor outcomes.

A formal social investment approach to funding and service provision will be adopted, which will use actuarial valuations to identify highest needs and risks leading to targeted early interventions.ⁱⁱⁱ

As these reforms are still being introduced, there is not yet any detailed information about the improvements or outcomes of these reforms. Further information on the scope of the New Zealand reforms can be found at <http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/investing-in-children/index.html>

An investment approach to welfare has recently been introduced by Australia's Federal Government in order to decrease welfare dependency. The Department of Social Services has introduced the *Priority Investment Approach* which uses actuarial analysis to identify groups at high-risk of long-term welfare dependency^{iv}. The valuation of future lifetime welfare costs and analysis is intended to help tailor investments to identify and remove barriers to people joining the workforce.^v

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Perhaps you could take this question on notice. My question is about soft entry points to services. I cannot think of a harder entry point than turning up cold at someone's door, knocking on the door and saying, "There have been 15 reports and I am just here to help." That is a pretty hard entry point. A number of submissions talk about services being available through soft entry points—mothers' groups, the local gym. Could you provide your thoughts on how we could target services through soft entry points rather than hard entry points?

The Benevolent Society aims to help families with entrenched and complex problems and who are 'hard to reach' through traditional service models. This includes: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families; single parent families; fathers; jobless families; and income support dependent families.

Research shows that the parents in most need tend to be the ones who are least likely to access support services.^{vi} We use a range of methods to engage with hard to reach families, including:

- collaborating with other organisations providing services to increase capacity and leverage resources
- providing non-threatening soft entry points to engage families
- offering incentives such as food or social activities
- providing services in universal locations
- providing information on services in universal locations
- recruiting workers and volunteers from the same target group as participants
- offering culturally appropriate activities.^{vii}

The Benevolent Society provides a range of soft entry points for engaging with children and families. For example, we have a service, Wheely Good Fun, which is a mobile supported playgroup for children aged 0-5 years and their families. Wheely Good Fun provides children and their families with a quality playgroup setting that offers social, emotional and cognitive developmental experiences. Currently Wheely Good Fun operates the in South West Sydney area (Miller, Hinchinbrook, Ashcroft) and recently in Northern Sydney area (Ashquith). The program allows caseworkers to engage with families who may not otherwise be accessing family support services. The program is connected to our Brighter Future programs which provide case management for risk of significant harm (ROSH) families. Brighter Futures also supports playgroups.

In the playgroup setting we are able to engage with families regarding their children's development and wellbeing in a more informal and relaxed manner than if the family is directly approached by an intensive child protection caseworker.

Other soft entry points which enable caseworkers from NGOs to meet with vulnerable families and identify child protection concerns before they reach reportable levels or crisis stage include:

- NGOs partnering with community health clinics to jointly provide parenting courses, protective behaviours workshops or playgroups supported by an Early Childhood Nurse
- NGOs working with primary schools to provide parenting programs, protective behaviours/healthy relationship programs as part of school mentoring or breakfast club programs. NGO representatives could also be part of a school's welfare team to provide guidance and support around child protection issues.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: You can also take this question on notice. Can you tell us how many hours the people with whom you work, the teams, work after standard business hours and on weekends?

The Benevolent Society case workers under programs such as Brighter Futures are contracted to work 'standard business hours'. However, if a crisis situation continues beyond normal working hours a caseworker would continue to attend, and may call upon support from FACS or from the police depending on the nature of the crisis. Similarly, if a caseworker is working with a family to establish routines they may attend the home at 7.00am to support the family establish a routine for getting children up, fed and ready for their day or may visit after standard hours to ensure working parents are included in the family's case plan.

The Benevolent Society also delivers the Resilient Families program which has a different funding model – it is funded under a social benefit bond. The Resilient Families program includes funding for 'on-call support' – which enables an initial period of 24/7 support.

Whilst providing on-call support is more expensive, it enables more a flexible response as, given the nature of the work, often support is required outside of 'standard business hours'.

ⁱ Ministry of Social Development (New Zealand) (2016), Investing in Children Programme, at <http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/investing-in-children/index.html#Background1>

ⁱⁱ The full list of foundational building blocks includes:

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As per Ministry of Social Development (New Zealand) (2016), The foundation building blocks of the future operating model, at <http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/investing-in-children/the-future-operating-model-and-its-building-blocks.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ministry of Social Development (New Zealand) (2016), The foundation building blocks of the future operating model, at <http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/investing-in-children/the-future-operating-model-and-its-building-blocks.html>

^{iv} Department of Social Services (2016), Australian Priority Approach to Welfare, at <https://www.dss.gov.au/review-of-australias-welfare-system/australian-priority-investment-approach-to-welfare>

^v Department of Social Services (2016), Australian Priority Approach to Welfare, at <https://www.dss.gov.au/review-of-australias-welfare-system/australian-priority-investment-approach-to-welfare>

^{vi} Moore, T. and McDonald, M. (2013). *Acting early, changing lives: how prevention and early action saves money and improves wellbeing.*

^{vii} The Benevolent Society. (2013). *Evaluation of The Benevolent Society's Communities for Children Programs.*