

SWiS NEWS



social workers
in schools

... AUGUST 2007

You can be proud... It was a time to celebrate who we are today, and look forward to who we will be tomorrow, at the Social Workers in Schools Conference in Christchurch.



The theme for the seventh SWiS conference in May, was 'acknowledge our past, celebrate our present, create our future.' "It was a great time for social workers to reflect together on where they wish to take the profession," said Veronica Bennett, team leader for Social Workers in Schools. "Social Work in Schools has reached an important stage of development in New Zealand, as we have now joined the international stage with New Zealand hosting the 4th International Conference on School Social Work in 2009," she said. "This will be a fantastic opportunity for practitioners in the field of school social work to share best practice with other countries and showcase our leading models here."



The conference began with video clips of New Zealand children sharing their hopes and dreams. They aspired to a good education and rewarding job, and wanted the world to be a safe place. They also dreamed of having their own children that they could love and support, and said they needed to feel secure themselves.



Throughout the conference there was a strong emphasis on the future of social service approaches and education directions. Keynote speaker Nicola Atwool, Principal Advisor from the Office of the Children's Commissioner, discussed their 10 year vision which provides a systematic approach to monitoring the development of every child and young person in New Zealand. *Continued over...*



in this issue

- Social Work Study Awards
- Partnering up: How Vicky and Verna are changing children's lives
- Suspend reality: Peter Norton on reducing suspensions

note for readers

You are welcome to submit stories or let us know of any upcoming events. We look forward to your contributions. Please send them to:
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or email cyf_swis@cyf.govt.nz
Send any items by October 2007.

(Please note that we reserve the right to edit contributions).

>> Check it out www.sswaa.org/ for interesting resources and info.

Dr Rajen Prasad, the Families Commissioner, looked at the changing shape of New Zealand families and its implications for social workers in schools, describing their role as 'the new frontline for early intervention'.



Ruth Dyson, Minister for Child, Youth and Family, who gave the closing address, said the SWiS service can "take pride in its uniqueness".

"You can be proud of the work you have achieved in being active participants in creating a positive future both for the children and families you work with and for yourselves as professional practitioners," she said.

"You can pay people to work, but you can't pay them to care," said Minister Dyson. "So I thank you for your commitment, your professionalism and for the fact that you do care."



Tena koe everyone • • • • By now I expect you are well back into the busyness of term time, and wondering if the last school term break ever really happened! I hope that you are keeping away the winter blues and have found some time to reflect on the year so far.



I've been taking some time lately to reflect on the future, and we are

currently consulting through the service providers about the direction of our SWiS conferences and forums. After organising five national conferences and a number of provider forums and various seminars, it is a good time for me to look back on what is working, and look forward to what we might be doing differently. We are consulting on what is needed to meet the objectives of relationship building and professional development across the service, and seeking suggestions on the format of any future events. Make sure you drop us a line with your thoughts about this.

I've been keeping busy over the last few months in Auckland establishing the transfer of the secondary schools from the Ministry of Education initiative, Healthy Community Schools, to funding from Child, Youth and Family for social support in the schools and associated programmes. It has been a very rewarding experience to

work with such a highly committed group of principals who form the AIMHI consortium representing 10 schools. Their drive to get the very best wrap-around support for their students is inspiring. We will work closely with these schools to develop strategies that strengthen the social work services component in the student support teams they have in place. For more information go to the Ministry of Social Development website www.msd.govt.nz/media-information/budget-fact-sheets/2007/multi-agency

Lately, as I work across the sector, I can feel the positive buzz in the air as we experience more and more gains emerging from our efforts to develop collaborative relationships and build on what works. I want to congratulate you all for your contributions to making these relationships and services work, as it ultimately results in our tamariki having the very best chance to realise their potential.

Warm regards
Veronica Bennett
 Team Leader, SWiS

Opotiki puts on party *A small community put on a big party to celebrate the launch of their SWiS programme.*

"As far as I know, we're one of the few in New Zealand to do an official launch for SWiS," says Anita Waitoa, the new social worker in schools, working for Te Ha O Te Whanau Trust in Opotiki. "We're proud of the launch, being a small community and being a mainstream organisation that operates on Maori values and Tikanga."

The launch was a true community effort, which included a cake made by a colleague and then decorated in the SWiS colours by another talented colleague. People came from the surrounding districts of Rotorua, Tauranga and Whakatane to attend the launch, including three principals from other

schools who came to find out more about the programme.

Anita was the first social worker in the SWiS programme to become registered, and spent four years working in Gisborne, before making the move to Opotiki in November 2006.

Her new role has given her a sense of homecoming. "I came from a small place in the East Coast, and although I didn't realise it at the time, we grew up with a social work ethic, being Maori and supporting activities around the Marae. We were a small community and we knew everybody and everyone," she says.

Among her initiatives since beginning the programme in Opotiki, Anita is running programmes for children on loss and grief, anger management for boys and coping strategies for family violence.

She is already seeing lives changing for local families. One mother, who had six children in care, now has her children back and Anita is working with her on good parenting strategies.

"In a nutshell, we're there to provide resources, advocate for and support children and families," says Anita of her role. "It's not just about at-risk kids, you are inspiring and mentoring all of the children in the school community."

Awards for social work study

Applications are now open for the NGO Social Work Study Awards.

These awards are for NGO employees who have previously studied or are studying, and want to complete a social work qualification that meets the requirements for social worker registration.

In the 2007 round, 65 new study awards will be made, with each study award having a maximum value of \$32,750.

Students can receive up to \$10,500 over the duration of the award to help with their course fees.

For employers, there is a contribution of up to \$13,500 for support, such as backfilling the employee's position while they are studying.

Applications can be made by any NGO social worker who is enrolled in, or intending to enrol in, a course that is recognised by the Social Workers Registration Board.

Applicants need to be employed by an NGO and preference will be given to employees who are employed 30 or more hours per week, and who have previously studied or are already studying.

Applications close on 28 September 2007, and it's recommended that an application is completed by both the employee and employer.

For more information, and to find out how to make an application, go to www.familyservices.govt.nz/ourwork/community-development/ngo-study-awards/index.html



School rulz

Peter Norton doesn't always believe in playing by the rules. "When a student gets suspended the principal and the Board often believe that 'these are the school rules, they broke the rules and there needs to be a consequence'. But I say, 'There is nothing as unequal as the equal treatment of all'."

"Vulnerable students have more going on in their life than the average student, you need to look behind the behaviour," he says. "Maybe this child gets up in the morning and there's no one home other than the brothers and sisters. He has to get his brothers and sisters up, then gets to school late and the teacher ridicules him in front of the class. Why wouldn't he then start creating havoc?"



Social workers can be the best advocate for the child, by painting a full picture of their home life for the teacher and principal, says Peter, manager of student support for central south in the Ministry of Education.

He is passionate about reducing suspension rates and keeping students in school. Research shows that for every year a student stays in school after the age of 16, their annual earnings increase for life by 14.3%, and students who only stay on for one extra year increase their earnings by an average of 12%.

Even if they don't earn a qualification, the life benefits are remarkable. Staying in school increases socialisation, physical and mental health, the ability to have positive relationships and even life expectancy.

A little respect...

On the other hand, suspension often results in the student getting into a spiral of isolation and boredom, which can then lead to truancy, stealing and drugs, youth offending and unemployment.

Some schools need to change how they manage these students, says Peter. "The aim of the game is to change how schools act towards students. You cannot change anyone else's behaviour, only your own, which will in turn change how students react."

This is all to be done in an environment where the community and the media are watching closely, which can make it very difficult for schools. However, several schools in Peter's region are changing their school culture and successfully reducing suspensions. Dannevirke High School, for example, consulted with students in developing the Effective Behaviour System. It requires adults to show respect and follow regulations in dealing with students.

"You don't yell across the courtyard at a student, 'Hey you, take off your jacket!' This creates a situation where the teacher has to win," says Peter. "Go up to the student, and without raising your voice say, 'You've got five minutes to take off your jacket', or what ever the request is. The student gets to maintain their mana in front of their mates. I'm not saying this will work for all, but it will not ratchet up the situation."

As a result of these initiatives and others, suspensions in the south-central region have dropped from 153 last year, to 83 this year. He acknowledges that 2005 "was a bad year, but we are improving".



Staying in school

Reducing suspensions means examining the reasons why students are suspended. Students are most frequently suspended for continual disobedience (34%) and drug taking (21%).

Drug abuse, for example, is now being seen more frequently as a health, rather than a discipline issue. One school discovered nine boys were taking drugs. Instead of suspending them, the principal met with the boys and their parents, and together agreed that the boys would attend a drug-education course for six weeks, be intermittently tested for drugs, and do work around the school on a Saturday morning as discipline.

“I thought this was a very smart solution because it’s not damaging their education. It’s putting in place an educational solution and it involved the parents,” says Peter. “Why penalise them for the rest of their days for one mistake?”



What can SWiS do?

When a mayor met with his school principals recently, he asked them a question: ‘If you could have one resource, what would it be?’ All the principals said, ‘A social worker’.



Social workers can visit the home, be an advocate for students, and work with families on issues before they become a crisis. This is essential in keeping students engaged in school.

The first time a child truants, the social worker should visit the home, says Peter. “If you don’t get a child the first time they truant, it’s 90% certain they’ll do it again...but next time they’ll get bored, and go to the mall and steal stuff for excitement.”

Social workers can be a personal and friendly face, during difficult moments in a child’s school career. Walking them through the transition from primary to secondary school, for example. “This is often done poorly with many students confused and lost on arrival at secondary,” says Peter. “They need time over several visits to understand and become assimilated into secondary school. This will reduce anxiety and help relationships with teachers.”

The SWiS programme has already responded to this by allowing for the service to continue working with a client, up until the end of term one of starting any secondary school, using a transition plan. By helping keep students in school, social workers really can help change the course of a child’s entire life.



Vicky and Verna

Partnering up: Verna and Vicky

“I speak with a mum often, but on this particular day she burst into tears,” says social worker in schools Verna Huata. “I want to thank you for giving me back my son,” said the mum. “You know he loves you, eh, because you took the time to listen.”

The 10-year-old boy had been on a self-destructive course, greatly troubled at home and misbehaving in school. Through a partnership with Vicky Kenrick, the Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour, the boy was diagnosed with a learning disability. Verna found funding for him to get glasses, and they created plans to be used at home and school. “Then everything just fell into place,” says Verna.

Two years later, and the mum still rings up Verna to let her know how the boy is doing. This is just one example of the huge difference in children’s lives that their partnership at Napier’s Maraenui School is making.

The two began working together in 2004, when they were involved in a skills development class for boys with learning and behavioural difficulties. Verna helped with self-esteem building, while Vicky focussed on the academic side. They quickly realised the benefits of working together, to achieve the best results for the child.

Now they regularly meet as part of a wider committee, so that each practitioner can bring their knowledge to best meet the child’s needs.

In partnership, they are able to put together the puzzle pieces of home life and school behaviour. Recently, they worked to help a student at risk of expulsion because of her behaviour. Vicky was able to help the child with psychological tests, which showed she had ADHD, while Verna worked with the parents to explain the child’s needs.

“At first the parents said, ‘Why does she need the tests, she’s not dumb’. But once Verna visited the parents they did a complete turnaround because she was able to explain it,” says Vicky, who has been an RTLB for seven years.

“Reality sometimes bites when you visit the home. You really get insight into the child and a lot of things click. I will tell Verna the educational side of the child’s needs, and Verna will bring that to the home as well.”

Getting the parents to participate in the child’s programme is key to their success. “Most parents are only too glad to get help,” says Verna. “We have to make it OK to ask for help.” In five years as a social worker in schools, says Verna, she has only had one parent turn down assistance.

In writing this story, we discovered a number of social workers in schools who are working effectively with their RTLBs. This is an innovative and inspiring approach, which ultimately benefits the children and families in our communities. Keep up the good work!

“Most parents are only too glad to get help.”

Poverty is a big issue for their decile one school, so help can be as simple as setting up a payment scheme for the children's stationery, or providing parenting skills.

Partnership has strengthened the effectiveness of their work. “We reinforce what each other is doing. Verna will say to me, ‘Do you want me to take the lead?’. We have a really good working relationship.” Verna may provide counselling, while Vicky instils discipline, and they both work together to bring the teacher and parents on board with their intervention plan.

Sharing the burdens of everyday life as a social worker has also been helpful. “It has taken away that feeling that you are working by yourself. I was feeling really isolated, but I can work with Vicky and share knowledge,” says Verna, who is currently finishing a social services qualification through Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi.

“It really helps with time management as well,” says Vicky. “You can get things done twice as fast. I would definitely recommend it to other schools.”

How to talk with children

SWiS worker Andy Downs has posters of racing cars and surfing on his walls. He uses them to talk to young people about his interests, which in turn helps the young person to talk about their own interests.

This was just one tip that Andy shared during a workshop on how to talk with children, which he ran at the SWiS Conference in May, along with Jackie Sanders, researcher from the School of Sociology and Social Work at Massey University.

‘Learning to listen’ was the skill they considered most important, as well as the social worker using their own intuitive knowledge and utilising their own strengths and creativity.

Andy explained that his style was to create a friendly environment with the young person. He will sometimes read out stories from the book ‘Chicken Soup for the Soul’ and talk about the meaning behind the stories. The children call him by his first name, which emphasises that he isn't part of the school hierarchy, and he makes himself visible in the school as an approachable person. He also likes to involve parents in the school, inviting them ‘beyond the school gates’.

Workshop participants were asked to share their own experiences and techniques that work. Responses included:

- sense of humour
- sophisticated ‘colour by numbers’ approach, with colours to represent emotions
- playing quoits – children talk about stuff without realising as they are distracted by the game
- looking at strengths cards – choosing which one appeals to them
- discussing whanau connections
- hands on, activity-based approach
- children draw houses they live in, asked to draw happy or sad faces on the people who live there
- playing sport together, eg shooting hoops and talking at the same time
- building connection with parents through BBQ or sausage sizzles
- looking at the good things people have done for them
- playing marbles together
- incorporating Tikanga Maori
- telling stories
- encouraging manaaki and awahi within the school, so students will tell the social worker if they notice somebody is having problems.

A practice thought *from Nicki Weld*



We know in our work and in life that if we do what we have always done, we will get what we have always got.

Social work as a profession has the ability to think widely about social issues from a systems perspective, and to harness existing strengths and resources to enable innovative change. To do this with families

we ask how things would be different if the problems were not there, and how they would know changes were happening.

We explore if any of these changes are already occurring, and identify exceptions to the problem that we can build on.

Recently our country has experienced the tragic deaths of a number of young people through acts of violence. I believe social work has a role in leading social change to address issues such as violence by focusing on what solutions might look like, and learning from areas where the

“If we do what we have always done, we will get what we have always got.”

problems are not as evident. If social work is to keep pace with changes occurring both locally and globally it is essential that it has a vision for the future. For me this is about contributing to social change and

ensuring social work has a strong voice in society based on an understanding and analysis of social issues.

I particularly liked the whakatauki offered by Cathy Diggins at the 2007 SWiS national conference that connects to this:

“I etahi wa, me mau ke ki nga toihuarewa kia maiangi ake o te wa ka rarapa ki uira hei tohu i tou ara hou”

“There are times when we must grasp the opportunity, take the risk and create our own history.”

IN BRIEF:

Professional development

The new SWiS Professional Development Advisory Group had a very positive first meeting on May 31. The group began reviewing the core competencies for SWiS with the aim of developing a competency framework for the service. The team consists of Liz Beddoe, Pania Hetet, Naomi Hesseling, Pam McCann, Penni Norman, Edwina Brookes, Lorraine Scanlon, Nicki Weld and Russell Buchanan. Upcoming work areas include a review and enhancement of the SWiS orientation training, and planning for an advanced supervisor's training. Regular updates will be provided as work progresses.

Useful links

Check out the following links page of the International Network website for information on social work in schools in other countries at www.international-network-schoolsocialwork.htmlplanet.com/links.html

There are also interesting articles on the UK National Association of Social Workers in Education website at www.naswe.org.uk