



social workers  
in schools

Section 6 Reference Resources

# Interface guidelines

*To support collaboration  
and partnership between  
Social Workers in Schools  
and Child, Youth and Family*



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The Social Workers in Schools (SWiS) service is funded by Child, Youth and Family (CYF). The SWiS service is contracted out to service providers, which means that there are several stakeholders involved in the process. However, this document refers to the relationship between the SWiS service (service providers, social workers in the schools and their supervisors) and CYF social workers and their managers.

The SWiS service works with vulnerable children and their families/whānau in low decile schools throughout New Zealand. There are a number of situations when the social workers in schools will interface with CYF social workers because of the shared population group of the two services. One of the highest times of stress for families/whānau is perhaps when there are concerns raised about a child's care and protection that require the intervention of CYF. It is at these times that the partnership and relationship between CYF and other services such as SWiS need to be at optimum levels.

These guidelines provide information to enhance communication, collaboration, commitment, and trust between the two services from the local social work practice level supported by management. Firstly, a brief background is provided summarising what has and hasn't been working with the SWiS and CYF interface. This is drawn from interviews and conversations conducted in July 2007 with CYF and SWiS staff throughout New Zealand. Relevant principles for each service pertaining to the paramountcy of child safety and working in partnership are then provided. Specific suggestions on how to support a positive CYF and SWiS interface are offered, supported by appendices covering general information around building effective collaboration, examples, templates, and tools.

It is hoped these guidelines will be of practical assistance, both to explore the interface for local and regional areas and to offer suggestions on how to strengthen this if required. Many thanks to the SWiS and CYF staff, who contributed to the discussions, and also to the Differential Response Project team (CYF) for their knowledge and the High and Complex Needs team (HCN) for their generosity in sharing the work from their document – 'Better at working together – Advice on interagency working for front-line staff and managers at all levels' (2007).



## Key findings

*The guidelines are informed by discussions throughout New Zealand, which explored the interface between CYF and SWiS.*

### Key findings are listed below.

- A positive working relationship with the local site CYF practice leader was seen to enhance relationships between CYF and SWiS.
- CYF community liaison workers for individual schools improved communication.
- SWiS were seen as a useful connection with schools and liaison point for CYF workers.
- SWiS were seen to reduce the need for CYF involvement in some situations and were seen as a resource if kept involved after a CYF notification had been made.
- SWiS were able to have useful input into Family Group Conference plans through their knowledge of families/whānau.
- CYF contract specialist and community liaison worker roles were seen as providing a useful impartial way to resolve some issues between CYF and SWiS.
- A lack of feedback from CYF social workers on SWiS notifications exists in some areas.
- There was some confusion around role clarity.
- There was a lack of recognition that SWiS social workers are, in the majority, qualified and registered.
- SWiS was sometimes not making notifications to CYF when there were care and protection issues which may have required investigation.
- There was a lack of recognition by CYF of the SWiS service's comprehensive strengths and needs assessment process.

Overall it was felt that there were three broad areas that could be strengthened to provide a positive and proactive interface to best support children and their families/whānau.

- 1 Communication**
- 2 Collaboration and commitment**
- 3 Enhancement of trust**

To support these areas, an understanding of the principles that promote the importance of child safety and working in partnership is required.

## Key principles of Child, Youth and Family and Social Workers in Schools that support collaboration and partnership

**Child, Youth and Family**  
(Drawn from **Leading for Outcomes 2007-2008** and **Leading for Outcomes Year Two 2008**)

Due to the shared population groups that both services operate in, children and families/whānau are sometimes known both to SWiS and CYF social workers. It is therefore helpful to review the principles, that underpin each service, which support partnership and collaboration to promote child safety.

- The government's investment through Pathway to Partnership is aimed to significantly increase the capacity of community organisations to support our mutual outcomes.
- We want to develop a culture that encourages and supports our staff, partners and communities to develop local initiatives that focus on breaking the cycle of child abuse, neglect and offending in their communities.
- A priority is to respond to community needs and expectations to help shape local situations that achieve lasting outcomes.
- We will partner with others to deliver high-quality programmes and services.
- We believe that working together allows us the opportunity to unlock a different range of responses to meet the diverse needs of vulnerable young people and their families/whānau.
- We will actively lead communication with clients, staff and stakeholders.
- We will form partnerships with other organisations to provide opportunities for young people to aim high and build positive futures.

## Social Workers in Schools

(Drawn from the *Social  
Workers in Schools*

*Service Description 2008*)

- Children have a right to have their wellbeing and safety protected and promoted to achieve their full potential.
- Social workers are required to apply the paramountcy of the child principle in terms of safety.
- The SWiS service is required to have systems in place, which involve the Principal, to ensure a notification to CYF is made within 24 hours of becoming aware of a child whose safety is at risk.
- Where a family/whānau decision not to accept services is considered to place the child at risk of abuse or neglect, a notification will be made to CYF or the police, in keeping with the protocols set out in *An Interagency Guide for Breaking the Cycle*.
- SWiS is required to work in partnership with children and families/whānau in a voluntary (non-statutory) relationship which respects their right to participate fully in all aspects of service delivery.
- SWiS will work in collaboration with parents, family/whānau, government and voluntary agencies, local authorities, and community and business organisations to support the safety and wellbeing of children attending the school.
- SWiS will collaborate with social, health, and education agencies and other community services to achieve a coordinated, 'strengthening families' approach.
- SWiS will endeavour to complement rather than duplicate existing services (for example, services provided by CYF, education support services, and health services).

## General principles to build effective collaboration and partnering relationships

### Partnership can best be defined in terms of:

- active involvement
- shared decision making
- complementary expertise
- agreement of aims and processes
- mutual trust and respect, openness and honesty
- clear communication and negotiation.

(2006 Parentline Plus)

This description of partnership is applicable to working with families/whānau and between agencies and services. Further to this, the six principles below have been shown by research and fieldwork to be the building blocks for successful collaboration and partnership between agencies. They are taken from a self-assessment tool and advice on good practice for collaboration and were developed by the High and Complex Needs (HCN) Unit in New Zealand for frontline staff and local managers in 2006.<sup>1</sup> The principles are based on the Partnership Assessment Tool, developed by the Nuffield Institute at the University of Leeds and the Strategic Partnering Taskforce in the UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Better at Working Together: Advice on interagency working for frontline staff and managers at all levels: Part I, Literature review.* Melanie Atkinson, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> *Assessing Strategic Partnership – The Partnership Assessment Tool,* Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London, 2003.

**Principle 1** Recognise and accept the need for collaboration.

**Principle 2** Be clear and realistic about the purpose.

**Principle 3** Ensure commitment and ownership.

**Principle 4** Develop and maintain trust.

**Principle 5** Create clear and robust arrangements to support collaboration.

**Principle 6** Monitor, measure and learn.

Please see Appendix 1 for more details on these six principles.



## Suggestions to support a positive Child, Youth and Family and Social Workers in Schools interface relationship

### 1 Communication

The suggestions have been developed from the earlier interviews and discussions between CYF and SWiS staff. It is important that CYF sites and SWiS service providers take the time to build an agreed way of working that may include these suggestions or adapt them to best suit their identified collaboration requirements. This should ultimately be informed by what will be of greatest benefit for children and their families/whānau.

#### It is desirable that CYF provide feedback to the SWiS service when receiving notifications from them, at the following suggested times:

- a** When the notification has been received from the SWiS service, the allocated CYF social worker contacts the SWiS social worker and discusses their understanding of the family situation. They may also involve the SWiS social worker and service provider in the decision making around the appropriate intervention pathway at this initial stage.
- b** If an investigation has been undertaken, the CYF worker recontacts the SWiS service to tell them of the outcome of this and inform them of any next steps.
- c** When CYF is closing off its involvement with the family, the CYF social worker will inform the SWiS service of this decision and of the outcome.
- d** It is desirable that the SWiS service provide feedback to CYF on matters that have been referred to them.

#### Generally

When a Family Group Conference is held about any child attending a school with a SWiS service, the social worker in the school should be considered as an invited attendee at the conference.

Where both services are involved with a family, workers should take action to ensure appropriate information is shared in a timely manner and in accordance with the Interagency Information Sharing Guidelines. This includes CYF ensuring the SWiS service is informed when a child is in CYF custody or guardianship. Informing the school about other plans such as, access, support and progress of preliminary plans, is also essential in these situations.

SWiS may inform their local CYF site of programmes they are running that may be of benefit to children in the custody or guardianship of CYF, and who attend a school within their school cluster.

## 2 Collaboration and commitment

The SWiS service provider ensures new social workers in schools in their service provider areas are introduced to the CYF site as part of their induction. They may negotiate with the CYF community liaison worker to undertake this function.

It is desirable that regular meetings are held with the SWiS provider manager/supervisor and the local CYF practice leader to discuss local and statutory initiatives and manage any issues that may have arisen between the two services. Ideally these meetings will be held at least once every three months or as required. This could be standard practice that is not dependent on individuals but rather an agreed requirement of the role.

Joint meetings between the two social work groups may be facilitated by the CYF practice leader or SWiS service provider alternating between the provider agency and the CYF site as a venue.

Where possible the social workers in the schools may take support roles with families/whānau to help them with CYF processes. This can include explaining what is happening and participating in meetings with the family where appropriate. Examples of these types of meetings may include Family Group Conferences and Strengthening Families meetings.

When CYF is required to talk with children at schools, the social workers in the schools can support the children where appropriate and ensure suitable interview spaces are found. They may assume the role of broker between CYF and the schools in these situations.

## 3 Enhancement of trust

Practice leaders, and provider service managers/supervisors can develop ways to increase contact with each other, especially to allow for increased understanding of the role and approach of other workers.

Social workers from both services should be encouraged to establish close working relationships and professional links with each other.

CYF and SWiS social workers can attend joint training opportunities to support professional development and also to provide opportunities to understand roles and responsibilities and to deal with any misconceptions and stereotypes that may have developed. Multi-agency training is also helpful in supporting this.

Senior staff in both services should encourage respect and a positive view of each other's workers and model collaborative working through their leadership roles.

If case difficulties arise, each service should have a clearly defined conflict resolution pathway with the other service, which will be led by senior staff and managers.



### 3 Enhancement of trust continued

It is helpful to have documented, agreed ground rules for meetings and ensure people have signed up to these (see Appendix 5).

As much as possible both services need to use plain English to reduce possible confusion and 'us and them' situations that can result from the use of technical language and jargon.

It is important to recognise that 'collaboration fatigue' can occur when expectations are unrealistic and interagency work is not supported by the infrastructure of the two services.

It is important for successes experienced when jointly working with families/whānau to be recognised by both services.







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