

Children's Action Plan

Identifying, Supporting and
Protecting Vulnerable Children

THE WHITE PAPER FOR
VULNERABLE CHILDREN

October 2012

Introduction

New Zealanders want to know what action is being taken to protect children and when each milestone will be achieved.

The Children's Action Plan provides this framework. It is a living document that will continue to evolve as New Zealanders work together to achieve the fundamental changes contained in the White Paper for Vulnerable Children.

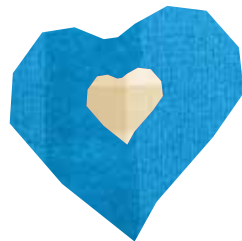
The Government consulted the public on *what* changes were needed; New Zealanders contributed through the Green Paper and the Government has made those decisions in the White Paper. Now the Children's Action Plan provides an opportunity for New Zealanders to have a say on *how* these changes are implemented. It is that on-going consultation that will continue to give life to this document which will be updated regularly.

The Children's Action Plan sits behind the White Paper which targets vulnerable children who are at risk of harm now or in the future. It contains comprehensive solutions to complex problems.

The White Paper solutions include legislative changes, information sharing, tracking vulnerable children, tougher penalties for and monitoring of child abusers, screening those who work with children, a free child protect phone line, public awareness campaigns, local children's teams and shared responsibilities for all New Zealanders.

Every time the Children's Action Plan is updated, it will be reissued in a new colour so it's easy to recognise the latest, most up to date version as we progress through the plan.

This is New Zealand's Children's Action Plan.



Children at the centre of what we do

Activity

Ensure services for children and families are child-centred

What / Action

Introduce a new Vulnerable Children's Bill which puts in place a child-centred approach and tough new laws to protect children

How / When

First six months:

- Cross-agency Care Strategy for children developed, with government departments sharing accountability and responsibility for results
- Build prototype of Vulnerable Kids Information System

Year 1 (by the end of 2013):

- Introduce a Vulnerable Children's Bill which includes provisions requiring agencies working with children to place the child's interests at the centre
- Introduce legislation for Child Abuse Prevention Orders to keep children safe from abusers who pose a risk to children
- Launch a scholarship programme and call for scholarship nominations/applications
- Implement integrated care plans for each child in care
- Establish two Children's Teams as demonstration sites

Year 2 (by the end of 2014):

- A free "Child Protect" line up and running for the public to report concerns by phone, email, text or online
- Implement Children's Teams in other locations

Year 5 (by the end of 2017):

- Implementation of Children's Teams complete
- Evaluate the implementation of the vulnerable children's legislation

Reporting child abuse

Activity

Act early to protect children

What / Action

Better reporting, easier ways to raise concerns, clarity on society's expectations of parents, and advice on how to spot child abuse and neglect

How / When

First six months:

- Develop practical tips, information and guidance for parents, families, neighbours and communities about what they should be concerned about, warning signals and where to go for help

Year 1 (by the end of 2013):

- Design a national public awareness initiative to let everyone know that child abuse and neglect will not be tolerated and child welfare is everyone's responsibility
- Introduce legislation requiring all agencies working with children to have policies and reporting systems in place to recognise and report child abuse and neglect
- Release "*Working with Children Code of Practice*" for professionals working with children

Year 2 (by the end of 2014):

- Launch the national public awareness initiative supported by funding available for community-led programmes
- Launch "*Child Protect*" line for the public to report concerns by phone, email, text or online

Year 3 (by the end of 2015):

- Frontline people who work with children (eg doctors, teachers) to be trained to recognise the signs of child abuse
- Run the public awareness campaign

Finding, checking and connecting

Activity

Find, assess and connect the most vulnerable children to services earlier and better

What / Action

Create a secure information system for vulnerable children, supported by information-sharing, risk profiling and tracking systems, and monitoring of high-risk adults

How / When

First six months:

- Build prototype of the new Vulnerable Kids Information System, which will also enable tracking of high-risk adults and offenders

Year 1 (by the end of 2013):

- Introduce legislation, if required, to support greater information-sharing between government agencies and also with Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)
- Develop a code of conduct on information-sharing

Year 2 (by the end of 2014):

- Implement the Vulnerable Kids Information System, including training for those using the system
- Train agencies, NGOs and professionals on a safe information-sharing code of conduct
- Audit secure information access regularly to ensure information is being accessed and used appropriately
- Provide NGOs contracted to deliver services to vulnerable children and their families with appropriate access to information on the children they are working with

Year 5 (by the end of 2017):

- Evaluate safe information-sharing protocols, systems and access

Working together, sharing the responsibility

Activity

Chief Executives of the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, NZ Police, the Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment (Housing), and Te Puni Kōkiri to be jointly accountable for achieving results for vulnerable children

What / Action

Establish local multi-disciplinary Children's Teams

How / When

First six months:

- Confirm the location of the first two Children's Teams by December 2012
- Agree how the Children's Teams will be demonstrated and evaluated
- Hold design and testing workshops on Children's Teams with on-the-ground practitioners, particularly iwi, hapū and NGOs

Year 1 (by the end of 2013):

- Introduce legislation to give effect to shared accountability arrangements and Children's Teams
- Establish two Children's Teams to test the new early response system including: identification and assessment tools, single integrated plans and a Lead Professional for each child
- Establish Regional Children's Directors to provide regional leadership

Year 2 (by the end of 2014):

- Implement Children's Teams in other locations

Year 5 (by the end of 2017):

- Implementation of Children's Teams complete
- Evaluate the Children's Teams

Focusing on what works

Activity

Fund only those programmes and services that make a difference, based on evidence

What / Action

Use and build on evidence of what works to improve results for vulnerable children and fund best practice services

How / When

First six months:

- Identify how Well Child/Tamariki Ora and Family Start can be better integrated
- Ensure Government's funding and purchasing decisions prioritise vulnerable children

Year 1 (by the end of 2013):

- Implement changes to better integrate Well Child/Tamariki Ora and Family Start programmes
- The Social Policy and Evaluation Research Unit (SuPERU) within the Families Commission will:
 - provide advice to Children's Teams on best practice and what works in their regions
 - review Government-funded parenting support provisions to ensure the right balance and mix of services to address families' needs

Year 2 (by the end of 2014):

- Implement changes to parenting support provisions following review of programmes

Protect and respond

Activity

Achieve better results for children in care

What / Action

Develop and implement a new cross-agency approach (Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and NGOs) to improve the outcomes for children in care, and support for children and young people transitioning from care

How / When

First six months:

- Cross-agency Care Strategy developed, with shared responsibility and accountability for results across agencies
- Every child or young person entering care will be referred for a Gateway Assessment

Year 1 (by the end of 2013):

- Implement the cross-agency Care Strategy
- Ask children in care what they believe can be improved
- Develop improved transitions from care to a Home for Life, or independent living as a young adult
- Implement stronger assessment, integrated care planning, monitoring and review of plans for children in care
- Introduce an expanded range and choice of care options for children in care, including whānau and hapū
- Announce additional assistance for kin carers

Year 2 (by the end of 2014):

- Develop cross-agency standards for assessment, care planning, monitoring and review of plans for children in care
- Implement consistent service delivery standards across agencies for children in care

Year 3 (by the end of 2015):

- Improve reporting on results for children in care
- Report on improved social work practices for children in care

Protect and respond

Activity

Deliver high quality care services

What / Action

Provide child-centred care through high quality placements and tailored support to caregivers, particularly to those who care for high-needs children and young people

How / When

First six months:

- Engage with iwi on the establishment of a national register of approved iwi caregivers
- Develop a plan to enhance the profile and status of Child, Youth and Family caregivers, including caregiver recruitment (vetting and screening), assessment and approval
- Scope initiatives to provide improved support and training for caregivers and approved iwi caregivers of high-needs children
- Investigate extending paid parental leave type support for caregivers providing a Home for Life

Year 1 (by the end of 2013):

- Establish a register of approved iwi caregivers in partnership with iwi
- Implement integrated care plans for each child in care, to ensure targeted support to the caregiver
- Increase the range of one-to-one Child, Youth and Family specialist caregivers who can provide care to high-needs children and young people

Year 2 (by the end of 2014):

- Implement high-quality assessments, approvals, support (including NGO support) and training for caregivers

Professionals helping children

Activity

Provide a safe and competent children's workforce that takes a child-centred approach

What / Action

Introduce new obligations for vetting and screening processes, and set minimum standards and core competencies for those working with children

How / When

First six months:

- Agree which organisations and professions form the 'core' children's workforce and the 'wider' children's workforce in order to prioritise and target workforce actions
- Develop vetting and screening guidelines for the children's workforce
- Assess international best practice competency approaches and their potential for application in New Zealand

Year 1 (by the end of 2013):

- Introduce legislation for the vetting and screening of the children's workforce
- Develop a Children's Workforce Action Plan including scope and processes
- Introduce policy and protocols for vetting and screening for the children's workforce
- Develop cross-sector common minimum standards, core competencies and training requirements

Year 2 (by the end of 2014):

- Ensure volunteers are appropriately included in vetting and screening, standards and competencies

Year 3 (by the end of 2015):

- Agree minimum standards and competencies in national guidelines for inclusion in organisations' employment, contracting and audit obligations

Year 4 (by the end of 2016):

- Continue implementation of the Children's Workforce Action Plan

Year 5 (by the end of 2017):

- Monitor and improve the effectiveness of vetting and screening, and new standards and competencies for the children's workforce

Dealing with abusers

Activity

Mechanisms to stop abusers working with children, and provide safe care for children who have been removed from their parents

What / Action

Introduce legislation to restrict people, in the home and at work, who pose a high risk to the safety of children from living or associating with children, and to provide the right arrangements for safe care of children

How / When

Year 1 (by the end of 2013):

- Introduce legislation to allow the court to make Child Abuse Prevention Orders to place restrictions in situations where an individual poses a high risk to a child or children in the future
- Introduce legislation, including special guardianship orders, for safe and stable permanent care for children who have been removed from their parents

Year 2 (by the end of 2014):

- Track and monitor high-risk offenders and people subject to Child Abuse Prevention Orders through the Vulnerable Kids Information System

Year 7 (by the end of 2019):

- Monitor and report on the impact of new legislation restricting the activities of people who pose a high risk to children

Mentoring and supporting

Activity

Individuals, corporates and other groups to step up and help vulnerable children

What / Action

Encourage individuals to volunteer to mentor vulnerable children, and encourage individuals, corporates and other groups to contribute to scholarships for vulnerable children

How / When

First six months:

- Promote mentoring of vulnerable children, using existing mentoring programmes
- Ensure existing providers of mentoring initiatives have safe volunteer mentoring systems, practices, procedures and protocols
- Establish and announce a scholarship framework including criteria, processes and funds management
- Seek donations from individuals, corporates and other groups for a scholarship fund for vulnerable children

Year 1 (by the end of 2013):

- Launch scholarship programme and call for scholarship nominations/applications
- Award scholarships and share recipients' stories

Year 3 (by the end of 2015):

- Evaluate mentoring schemes
- Monitor and review the process and promotion of scholarships

When agencies get it wrong

Activity

Ensure a robust and fair Child, Youth and Family complaints system

What / Action

An independent review of complaints processes relating to Child, Youth and Family

How / When

First six months:

- Commission an independent review of the existing Child, Youth and Family complaints processes to determine whether changes need to be made, including the possibility of establishing an independent complaints mechanism, separate from the Ministry of Social Development

Year 1 (by the end of 2013):

- Release the recommendations of the independent review of the existing complaints processes relating to Child, Youth and Family

Year 2 (by the end of 2014):

- Implement a best practice complaints systems for complaints about Child, Youth and Family

Year 4 (by the end of 2016):

- Monitor any recommended changes arising from the review
- Monitor satisfaction with the best practice complaints systems for Child, Youth and Family

