The Child Youth and Family Review: A Commentary on Prevention.

Dr. Emily Keddell, University of Otago

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About this report

This report is part of an ongoing series on urgent contemporary policy issues in Aotearoa New Zealand. This series is action-oriented and solutions-focused, with an objective of bringing academic research to bear on the economic, social and environmental challenges facing us today.

The Policy Observatory

Auckland University of Technology

Private Bag 92006

Auckland 1142

policyobservatory@aut.ac.nz

+64 9 921 9999 extn. 7531

http://thepolicyobservatory.aut.ac.nz/

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Foreword

Child protection services are in a process of ongoing reform. This includes the Vulnerable Child Reforms of 2011-2014 and, more recently, the creation of the new Ministry for Vulnerable Children | Oranga Tamariki in April 2017.

This report by social work academic Dr. Emily Keddell focuses on one aspect of the recent reforms: the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Keddell highlights the points of tension between the way that child abuse is defined throughout the review process, the details of the proposed reforms, and the design of child protection systems. She highlights the way that policies for the prevention of child abuse and neglect are informed by the government's new social investment approach, which in some cases could create perverse incentives for service deliverers in the non-governmental sector. Keddell recommends a more holistic approach to prevention, which shifts the emphasis 'away from treating problem individuals or families, and a narrow focus on the prevention of child abuse, to the provision of a broad policy landscape that promotes wellbeing.'

The report begins with an overview of the main points, followed by a more detailed examination of the reforms, and finishes with a series of recommendations.

Some key terms used in this report are:

Child Youth and Family (CYF): a government agency which existed from 1999 until March 2017, whose responsibilities included prevention of child abuse and neglect. It was located within the Ministry of Social Development since 2006.

Ministry for Vulnerable Children | Oranga Tamariki: the new government agency that replaced CYF on 1st April 2017. It has five core services: prevention services, intensive intervention services, care support services, youth justice services, and transition support services for young people leaving state care.

Modernising Child, Youth and Family Expert Panel: the Expert Panel that was established by the Minister of Social Development to review CYF and oversee the development of a new child-centric operating model. The Expert Panel delivered two reports, the Interim Report (2015) and the Final Report (2016), to guide the reform process.

Child, Youth and Family Review (CYF Review): the collective name for the review process which includes the Modernising Child, Youth and Family Expert Panel reports, associated Cabinet papers, and third-party reports such as Ernst & Young's.

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1: Overview

The recent review of Child, Youth and Family (henceforth the CYF Review) is wide-ranging. The reforms proposed in the Expert Panel's two 'Modernising Child, Youth and Family' reports will affect most aspects of child welfare provision – from prevention services to child protection and care services.[1]

This commentary focuses on one aspect of these reforms: *prevention*. This refers to efforts to prevent all forms of child abuse and neglect from occurring, and reducing harm when it does. The Expert Panel reports draw on a *systems perspective* to frame the proposed prevention policies. This means that the proposals recognise that a range of interlocking ministries, organisations and communities – these are the 'systems' – are required to provide a well-coordinated and successful response to this pressing social problem.

The proposals for prevention are still in development,[2] but hints so far suggest that this will mainly advance in three ways: (1) by offering targeted, evidence-based prevention programmes directly to families via third party contractors; (2) by increasing access for high needs children to universal services; and (3) by increasing the use of targeted coordination of services such as Children's Teams. Improved coordination between these three aspects of prevention will be achieved by having a 'single point of accountability' at the new Ministry of Vulnerable Children | Oranga Tamariki, which will ensure that when children are notified to the new Ministry, they get managed and systematic access to the services they need. Underpinning all of this is the broader *social investment approach* to social policy which aims to reduce the forward liability (the future financial costs) of the state by reducing future benefit system contact, criminal justice system contact, and notifications to the state child protection service.[3]

The shift to outcome measures is intended to make these services more 'child centred' and focussed on the effects on children, rather than focused on concrete outputs such as the number of assessments completed or bed nights provided. Certainly, there is a need for prevention framed by a systems perspective, centred on the experiences and effects on children and their families. But there are multiple points of tension between the details of the proposed reforms, the nature of the problem, and child protection systems design:

[1] Modernising Child, Youth and Family Panel (2015). *Modernising Child Youth and Family: Expert Panel: Interim Report*. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development; Modernising Child, Youth and Family Panel. (2016). *Expert Panel Final Report: Investing in New Zealand's Children and their Families*. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development.
[2] Emily Keddell (2017). 'Can the Ministry for Vulnerable Children succeed where CYF failed?' *The Spinoff*. 3rd April 2017. Retrieved from https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/03-04-2017/can-the-ministry-for-vulnerable-children-succeed-where-cyf-failed/
[3] New Zealand Institute for Economic Research (2016). *Defining social investment, Kiwi-style*. NZIER working paper 2016/5, December 2016.

- The individualistic framing of the causes of abuse, and targeting of individuals for services downplays key evidence about the relationship between child abuse and the broader social and economic context. Child abuse and neglect has a range of well-established relationships with social inequalities, poverty and community factors not addressed in the policy proposals. The comparisons between children in the care system with all other children exacerbates this.
- The use of a combination of Children's Teams, targeted family level prevention programmes (for example home visiting programmes), and existing universal services may not be able to provide the breadth and depth of prevention approaches required, given the multiple types, prevalence and causes of child abuse and available resources. Increasing access to slightly targeted services offered via universal services, broadening access to family level prevention services, and developing more intensive tertiary prevention services may be required.
- The expectation that market mechanisms can provide the full range of required services through third party contractors reflects a commitment to the reduction of the role of the state, and a faith in market-like arrangements to deliver the various types of services required. Whether or not this can meet the needs of prevention of child abuse and neglect is questionable, because market drivers of supply, demand and profit are unlikely to be responsive to the range and complexity of human problems encountered in the child welfare domain. It also leaves key responsibilities of the state up to third-party contractors to deliver.
- Many of these issues reflect the fact that prevention of child abuse and neglect and the new social investment approach are conflated in the current proposals. Reductions in renotifications, future welfare payments and criminal justice liability are stated as the aims of social investment in this context, but these all have tenuous relationships with reductions in the incidence of child abuse, and could create perverse incentives for NGOs. That said, there are various actuarial models proposed to implement the social investment approach. The proposed actuarial model produced by Ernst & Young is a more scientifically defensible and ethical model than the blunt tool of the outcomes stated in the Expert Panel reports, as it includes shorter-term outcomes and community level factors, and broadens the aim from the economically-oriented reduction of the forward liability, to the socially-oriented aim of child and family wellbeing.
- The method of ascertaining service entry contained in the proposals relies on notification to a central point, and will be supported with the centralised

aggregation of data across administrative data sets. This may be unwieldy in practice, and could essentially become a gate-keeping exercise that with limited resourcing will raise the bar to provision of services, and create lengthy centralised assessment processes. It also means people are unable to self-define their needs – if they are not probabilistically 'high risk' according to correlations in the administrative data, they may be unable to access services. Known problems with false negative and false positives in this kind of targeting may exclude some people from help, while others who do not need it may be offered it. This is heightened in the child welfare context, where much abuse and harm is never notified to child protection services, affecting predictive models and targeting.

- The sharing and analysis of administrative data to target particular people to receive services inherent in the social investment approach will rely on information-sharing arrangements that may lead to service disengagement. The justifications of preventing child deaths by this method is not borne out by the large numbers of people who will be affected in relation to the tiny percentage of serious harm cases.
- There is uncertainty over what proportion of the budget is going to be available to purchase preventive services and to provide for the increased demand on universal services and Children's Teams. It is not clear that there will be enough money left for prevention after all the other proposals are implemented, because prevention comes last in the staged rollout.
- Finally, the potential for a lack of adequate resourcing of prevention systems, when combined with the stronger imperative in the CYF Review to remove children earlier and place them in permanent care arrangements, means that a strong 'child rescue' outcome is likely. Child rescue approaches can lead to children being removed unnecessarily. They tend to overstate the benefits of foster care despite mixed evidence about its outcomes, downplay the harm of removal itself, and diminish the importance of family, whānau, iwi and community relationships. As Māori are over-represented in child welfare system contact, all of these points will have disproportionate effects on whānau and hapū Māori.

These problems could be avoided by taking a more holistic view of prevention, such as addressing the known causes of child abuse and neglect across the whole social ecology spectrum, and including wider forms of evidence when evaluating its success. This report argues for shifting the emphasis away from treating problem individuals or families, and a narrow focus on the prevention of child abuse, *to the provision of a broad policy landscape that promotes wellbeing*. Akin to an inequalities perspective in health, this approach recognises the intersecting factors across the whole social

context of families' lives that influence both abuse incidence and rates of contact with the child welfare system. A holistic approach is more likely to respond in ways that are sensitive to the contextual drivers that affect families and protect children across a range of negative outcomes. Achieving this will involve paying attention to the material conditions that families are living in, including reducing child poverty and improving housing access; providing better access to mental health and substance abuse services for parents; enabling non-stigmatising access to lower level 'hooded' services that are attached to universal services; providing more high intensity family preservation tertiary services; and resourcing community development approaches.

2: Reconfiguring Prevention.

Public policy scholar Carol Bacchi once wrote that 'every policy proposal contains within it an explicit or implicit diagnosis of the "problem".'[4]

When it comes to the emotive and complex nature of child abuse, this statement is particularly prescient. The combination of intense media and public interest, potential for political scandal, and profound moral implications make for a veritable storm of diagnoses of 'the problem'. In turn, how 'the problem' of child abuse is conceived has an influence on proposals for how to prevent it.[5]

Is child abuse a crime? Is it an indication of moral failure? Is it the work of psychopaths? Is it a sign of family stress? Parental trauma or poor role modelling? An indication of community beliefs? Is it related to poverty and social exclusion?

Alongside these different ways of understanding a problem's causes, there are also various ways of understanding who it affects. How big or widespread is child abuse, and who says so? Which populations does it occur in and how can they be identified?

Finally, differing understandings of the problem and who it affects intersect with different assumptions about the nature of the relationship between the state, children and families. Is the state responsible for intervening only when serious abuse occurs, or is it responsible to help prevent the social influences on parental behavior? Is there a responsibility to the whole family, or only to the child? If the latter, is it the responsibility of the adult family members to essentially look after themselves?

Each of these understandings of the problem, who experiences it, and whose responsibility it is, leads us in quite different directions for prevention policies. For example, one understanding might suggest that we increase surveillance to lead to more prosecutions, while another understanding might suggest that we increase mental health services to address parental risk factors, while another still might suggest that we reduce poverty.[6]

This dynamic is alive and well in the Modernising Child, Youth and Family reforms. The CYF Review took a systems perspective approach to reconfiguring the child welfare system; that is, it recommended changing the organisational structures, economic arrangements and guiding concepts that underpin the range of services that respond to child abuse and neglect. The subsequent reforms aim to ensure that the different services inside and outside the state interlock in ways that are both effective and efficient in response to child abuse and neglect, instead of ways that are disjointed, ineffective and wasteful of public monies. But which systems are selected for change relates back to how one understands what the problem causes are – and how child abuse and neglect relates to other problems affecting children.

[4] Bacchi, C. L. (1999). *Women, Policy and Politics: The Construction of Policy Problems*. London: Sage p.1.
[5] Keddell, E. (2015, April 24). 'The pictures in our heads: Part one'. Reimagining Social Work in Aotearoa New Zealand blog. Retrieved from http://www.reimaginingsocialwork.nz/2015/04/the-pictures-in-our-heads-part-one/
[6] Gilbert, N., Parton, N., & Skivenes, M. (2011). *Child Protection Systems: International Trends and Orientations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

3: The Child Youth and Family Review: A Story of System Failure?

In March 2015, following hard on the heels of the Vulnerable Children reforms of 2011–2014, Minister for Social Development Anne Tolley announced a review of the child protection system. She appointed the Child, Youth and Family Expert Panel to produce recommendations for how and why this was to be done. The *Expert Panel Final Report: Investing in New Zealand's Children and their Families* was released in April 2016. This includes changes to how the state engages with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as major reforms to Child, Youth and Family Service (CYF) which has since been renamed Ministry for Vulnerable Children | Oranga Tamariki.

These new reforms were justified by claims of poor outcomes, particularly for those in the foster care system, but also for families notified multiple times to CYF. One of several Cabinet Social Policy Committee papers which informed the CYF Review states that: 'Despite our best efforts and significant investment, children and young people who have required the intervention of the care and protection and youth justice systems have dramatically worse outcomes as young adults than the rest of the population'.[7] The paper goes on to note that currently those who come to the attention of CYF have high 'lifetime costs', mostly related to 'subsequent benefit receipt and involvement in the adult criminal justice system, rather than investment in preventative services'.[8]

Accordingly, the CYF Review's Expert Panel recommended modernising the department of Child, Youth and Family, which became the new, standalone Ministry for Vulnerable Children | Oranga Tamariki on 1st April 2017. The Expert Panel notes in their rationale that 'past reviews largely concentrated on CYF, rather than also examining the linkages with the wider social sector and the level of support required from other agencies… It is the view of the panel that improvements… can only be made by taking a system level view and taking a legislative and systematic approach to drive accountability to change outcomes across the sector'.[9] If preventive services fail, then children are to be removed to permanent homes at the 'earliest opportunity', a phrase repeated multiple times.

As stated, part of this system-wide reform is directed at the prevention services outside the state sector (CYF) that interact with the statutory service to provide the full range of child welfare services. The report points out 'that the system is not effective in supporting families and whānau to care for their children… New Zealand's vulnerable children are living in environments with high levels of need and deprivation, often experiencing the

[7] Tolley, A. (2016). 'Investing in children legislative reform: Overview – Final report of the Modernising CYF Expert Panel: Proposed blueprint for reform and implementation.' Cabinet Paper for the Cabinet Social Policy Committee. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development p. 1.
[8] Tolley, A. 'Proposed blueprint for reform and implementation' Cabinet Paper p. 4.
[9] Modernising Child, Youth and Family Panel. (2015). *Expert Panel Interim Report* p. 6.

combined impacts of long-term unemployment, low income, unaddressed physical and mental health needs, parental alcohol and drug addiction, family violence and crime'.[10]

In order to achieve these preventive efforts, the CYF Review recommended creating:

> a single clear point of accountability for meeting the needs of this group of children and young people, as well as establishing a common purpose across the system as a whole… creating a child-centred system where we recognise that only stable and loving families can provide the love and care that children need, support families to do so at the earliest opportunity… adopting a formal investment approach that will set ambitious targets and use an actuarial model, collect evidence about what works for whom, measure the impact on outcomes including forward liability across the system… As well as delivering services itself, the core agency will also directly purchase services, engage all New Zealanders, have a range of strategic partners and build the capacity and capability of the provider market… extending the range of services provided and ensuring more effective evidence-based service provision, by intervening earlier through targeted prevention and intensive support for families, [and] improved access to universal services…[11]

The ambition of the CYF Review is to fulfil these objectives by creating a new organisational structure which can serve as the central, single point of accountability. The Ministry for Vulnerable Children | Oranga Tamariki will be responsible for five major service areas: (1) prevention, (2) intensive intervention, (3) care support, (4) youth justice services, and (5) transition support.

Prevention services, according to the Ministry of Social Development's service and practice model, will be aimed at families identified as '*most at risk of poor outcomes*'. Prevention responses will 'focus on the underlying factors that make families and children more vulnerable, and on strengthening families and whānau to provide children with a loving and stable home'.[12] The new department's mandate is:

> …working with communities to *broker those services families need* at the earliest opportunity to provide safe, loving and stable care for their children. Where prevention services are required, they will be *delivered through strategic partnerships with other agencies, iwi and community organisations*, including the ability to *directly purchase* services on behalf of vulnerable children and their families from other agencies. The future department would have a *market making role* to create the *capability and capacity in the market* for the services that deliver *prevention outcomes*.[13]

[10] Tolley, A. 'Proposed blueprint for reform and implementation' Cabinet Paper p. 5.
[11] Tolley, A. 'Proposed blueprint for reform and implementation' Cabinet Paper pp. 6-7.
[12] Ministry of Social Development. (2016). 'Service and practice model'. Retrieved from the Ministry of Social Development website 21 November 2016: https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/investing-in-children/service-and-practice-model.html
[13] Author's emphasis. Modernising Child, Youth and Family Panel. (2016). *Expert Panel Final Report* p. 8.

Apart from these prevention services, the other methods used to deliver prevention outcomes are through better access to universal services and the increased use of Children's Teams. Children's Teams are groups of professionals in specific locations who work together to produce a single assessment of a child's needs, initiated as part of the Vulnerable Children reforms of 2011–2014. Their primary target group are children who do not require a statutory intervention, but nevertheless have complex needs which ideally require a collaboration between professionals to ensure a more efficient and coordinated response.

Thus, the Cabinet Social Policy Committee paper states that: 'While statutory care and protection will always be there for those who need it, better targeted and more intensive early support will also be provided at the first point of contact, with the aim of reducing the future level of contact… For the large majority of children, this will be achieved through improved access to basic universal services'.[14]

A second service area proposed by the CYF Review, which also relates to prevention, is *intensive intervention*. This will involve the new Ministry working 'intensively with families and whānau to keep their children safe at home, to where there are serious concerns, making decisions to move children into a loving stable family home at the earliest opportunity'.[15] Such decisions will be underpinned by a 'quality assessment process' to identify the right type of supports and services, and a single point of accountability for assessing needs and service provision. This assessment will be a 'time-bound process. If it does not affect sustainable change then an alternative caregiver family will be found for the child'.[16] These concepts are further articulated in a 2016 Cabinet Social Policy Committee paper, where it is claimed that the current system does not ensure the safety of children at 'the earliest opportunity', which leads to repeated notifications. This is referred to as a 'lost opportunity to address the problems confronting these children'.[17] This cabinet paper goes on to describe Children's Teams – that is, multidisciplinary teams that work with families outside the care system – as 'a model for early and intensive intervention' which could be built upon 'to ensure that children with a high level of need get the response they need in order to recover from harm and avoid escalation of harm in the future'.[18]

The role of data and analytics to support these changes is substantial, as evidence of effectiveness will be measured by linking the data of individuals across administrative systems. So, for example, if a family receives a service, they can be tracked to see if this has any effect on their future notifications to the child protection system, their future benefit receipts, or contact with the criminal justice system.

[14] Tolley, A. 'Proposed blueprint for reform and implementation' Cabinet Paper p. 7.
[15] Ministry of Social Development. 'Service and practice model'.
[16] Modernising Child, Youth and Family Panel. (2016). *Expert Panel Final Report* p. 81.
[17] Tolley, A. (2016). 'Investing in children legislative reform: Underpinning the new operating model. Paper 3: Intensive intervention and care support'. Cabinet Paper for the Cabinet Social Policy Committee. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development p. 3.
[18] Tolley, A. 'Intensive intervention and care support'. Cabinet Paper p. 3.

In turn, this relies on people sharing their personal information with their provider – which is likely to be an NGO – which is then fed back into the central database. This has significant privacy issues which are beyond the scope of this report.[19]

In addition, a proposed actuarial valuation will collect data about everyone referred to the child protection system or accessing an NGO service, in order to assess change over time. There is development work underway on how this actuarial model will operate, which will require significant investment into data infrastructure and maintenance in order to function as intended. A consulting report undertaken by Ernst & Young in relation to how the actuarial model would function gives further insights into the development of the analytic infrastructure underpinning prevention efforts. This report also makes several useful recommendations but to what extent these will be included in the final model is not clear.[20]

4: Points of Tension

The prevention policies proposed by the CYF Review are under development. The basic logic is sound: to create a range of preventive services, sensitive to the actual needs of families, that are well coordinated and effective, so that the harm caused by child abuse can be prevented from occurring. However, if we dig down into the details of what is proposed so far, we find multiple points of tension between this vision and the proposed policies.

4.1: Inappropriate choice of comparison group

The CYF Review is underscored by a narrative that compares those in contact with CYF with those who are not.[21] What this comparison wrongly implies is that contact with the care system is *the sole cause* of poor outcomes, rather than contact with the care system being *a symptom* of social problems (which may or may not be compounded by contact with care system).

This may seem like hair-splitting, but it is important to consider the child welfare system in context. While experiences of children in care are highly variable, ranging from terrible to fairly good, the rhetorical and statistical device of comparing children in contact with the care system with children who aren't overstates the influence of system contact on poor outcomes.

[19] Keddell, E. (2017, January). 'Big data (small data) and vulnerable children.' Paper presented at the Bioethics Conference, University of Otago Bioethics Centre, Dunedin New Zealand; Edwards, J. (2017). 'Privacy Commissioner's submission to the Social Services Committee on the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families (Oranga Tamariki) Legislation Bill.' Wellington, New Zealand: Office of the Privacy Commissioner.
[20] Ernst & Young. (2015, December 4). *Investment approach for vulnerable children: Feasibility assessment.* Prepared for the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development. Australia: Ernst & Young.
[21] Templeton, R., Crichton, S., Tumen, S., Rea, D., Ota, R. & Small, D. (2016). *Research Using Administrative Data to Support the Work of the Expert Panel on Modernising Child, Youth and Family*. Wellington: New Zealand Treasury.

A better comparison group, in line with best research practice into the outcomes of foster care, would be with those from a similarly disadvantaged background.[22]

This shift in focus onto the care system has the consequence of narrowing the policy response. In particular, it compels us to overlook important sources of family troubles, such as material conditions and community factors, which are identified as significant in other research into child abuse and neglect.[23] It results in the main policy responses being directed toward the care system, a focus which is welcomed by that subsystem, but downplays an emphasis on the family contexts that lead to children entering care. As the theoretical and empirical literature shows, prevention of child abuse and neglect is best conceived as a reduction of stressors across the whole ecological spectrum, involving a much wider understanding of prevention than the CYF Review embraces.[24]

4.2: A framework of individualism

The CYF Review's individualistic framing of the causes of abuse downplays key evidence about the relationship between child abuse and neglect and the broader social and economic context. Child abuse and neglect has a range of well-established relationships with social inequalities, community factors, and access to adult health services, with poverty a particularly consistent correlation.[25] The CYF Review's overly narrow view of prevention is reflected in the exclusion of social protections such as income adequacy and housing provision, the rejection of these aspects of policy from the remit of the new Ministry of Vulnerable Children| Oranga Tamariki, and the lack of plans to increase universal services or community development interventions.[26] In doing so, the CYF Review separates abuse prevention out from a wider range of 'coalescing goals' that could be addressed simultaneously in a prevention policy framework, while minimising the relationship between parenting and the social context it occurs within.[27]

[22] Biehal, N., Sinclair, I., & Wade, J. (2015). 'Reunifying abused or neglected children: Decision-making and outcomes.' *Child Abuse and Neglect, 49* pp. 107 - 118.
[23] Bywaters, P., Bunting, L., Davidson, G., Hanratty, J., Mason, W., McCartan, C., & Steils, N. (2016). *The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: An evidence review.* Coventry: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[24] Wolfe, D. A. (2011). 'Risk factors for child abuse perpetration'. In W. White, M. P. Koss & A. E. Kazdin (Eds), *Violence against women and children: Mapping the terrain,* vol. 1 (pp. 31-53). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association; Sethi, D., Bellis, M., Hughes, K., Gilbert, R., Mitis F., & Galea, G. (Eds). (2015). *European report on preventing child maltreatment.* Copenhagen, Denmark: World Health Organisation.
[25] Bywaters et al. *The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect*; Cancian, M., Shook Slack, K., & Yang, M. Y. (2013). 'The effect of additional child support income on the risk of child maltreatment'. *Social Service Review, 87*(3) 417- 437; McDonell, J. R., Ben-Arieh, A., & Melton, G. B. (2015). 'Strong communities for children: Results of a multi-year community-based initiative to protect children from harm'. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 41* pp. 79-96.
[26] Bilson, A., & Martin, K. E. C. (2016). 'Referrals and child protection in England: One in five children referred to children's services and one in nineteen investigated before the age of five'. *British Journal of Social Work 46* 1-19.
[27] Prinz, R. (2009). 'Toward a population based paradigm for parenting intervention, prevention of child maltreatment and promotion of child wellbeing'. In K. Dodge & D. Coleman (Eds.) *Preventing child maltreatment: Community approaches* (pp. 55 - 67). New York: The Guildford Press.

This individualistic approach to conceptualising the causes of abuse results in solutions that target the individual parent, and only the problem of child abuse. Yet addressing child abuse and neglect requires investment across the range of policy areas that will improve overall wellbeing, not just prevent child abuse, and should include community and macro-conditions, not just behaviour modification. As Ward states: '[D]espite the harms associated with maltreatment, if I were advising a mayor or governor, I would not recommend that he or she make major new investments in programmes that are framed as child maltreatment prevention programs. Preventing maltreatment must be a desired outcome, but not the primary focus, of public investments in children.'[28]

Human behaviour is shaped by subtle influences that emanate from both social contexts and individual responses. In social environments riven with inequalities, low social cohesion, or lack of access to universal services for issues such as parental mental health, individualised services aimed at teaching positive parenting will have a limited effect.[29] Solutions must include efforts to reduce poverty and work with communities on solutions relating more broadly to economic and social cohesion. These are serious omissions in the CYF Review, especially given that there is strong research that supports an enduring correlation between poverty and child protection system contact, and the longstanding associations between poverty and other child-related 'coalescing goals' such as improved child health and education.[30] Solomon and Asberg point out that the greatest single cause of abuse is parental stress, that preventive interventions must work to reduce stress for parents; and that poverty is often implicated in that stress.[31] Counts et al. note that reducing stress through access to concrete resources like money, food, shelter and medical care may assist with ameliorating parental stress in the context of child abuse.[32] Ensuring adults have access to mental health services and substance abuse services is an important part of reducing stress, as well as providing general social supports for people parenting in isolation. Yet our mental health services in particular are increasingly overburdened.[33]

[28] Ward, M. (2009). 'Preventing maltreatment or promoting positive development: where should a community focus its resources? A policy perspective' In K. Dodge. & D. Coleman (Eds.), *Preventing child maltreatment: Community approaches* (pp. 182-195). New York: The Guildford Press: p. 183.
[29] Molnar, B. E., Beatriz, E. D., & Beardslee, W. R. (2016). 'Community-level approaches to child maltreatment prevention. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 17*(4) pp. 387-397; & Prinz, 'Toward a population based paradigm for parenting intervention…'
[30] Bywaters, P. (2015). 'Inequalities in child welfare: Towards a new policy, research and action agenda'. *British Journal of Social Work, 45*(1) pp. 6-23; Bywaters et al. *The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect.*
[31] Solomon, D., & Asberg, K. (2012). 'Effectiveness of child protective services interventions as indicated by rates of recidivism.' *Children and Youth Service Review, 34* pp. 2311-2318.
[32] Counts, J. M., Buffington, E. S., Chang-Rios, K., Rasmussen, H. N., & Preacher, K. J. (2010). 'The development and validation of the protective factors survey: A self-report measure of protective factors against child maltreatment.' *Child Abuse & Neglect 34*(10) pp. 762-772.
[33] Carville, O. (2017, April 19). 'Damning report joins calls for inquiry into country's stretched mental health services.' *New Zealand Herald*. Retrieved from http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11841136

Some studies have found that providing financial and concrete supports to parents is more effective than programmes aimed at improving parent-child relationships or educating parents about child development.[34] These include studies that show:

- that when poverty rises, so do notifications to child protection services;[35]
- that increasing the income of poor lone mothers decreases their notifications for neglect to child protection services;[36]
- and that levels of deprivation are strongly related to contact with the child protection system more generally.[37]

This latter research prompted Bywaters et al. to consider contact with the child protection agencies as an expression of inequalities.[38] This, in turn, led them to quite a different and more helpful question: *Do child welfare interventions reveal, reinforce, or redress these inequalities?* The focus on wellbeing in the Ernst & Young report (see §4.5 below) – and in some parts of the CYF Review – should be heightened as the proposals take shape. The inclusion of social contextual factors must also be taken seriously. The separation of mechanisms which are able to deliver things like income adequacy from the remit of the Ministry for Vulnerable Children | Oranga Tamariki may make this challenging.

4.3: The balance of universal and targeted services

Another tension relates to the current availability of universal and more targeted services. The use of a combination of Children's Teams, existing universal services, and family-level prevention programmes may not be able to provide the breadth and depth of prevention approaches required, given the lack of resourcing of universal services and Children's Teams, different types of abuse, and the embeddedness of abusive behaviour in chronic and complex social problems.

[34] Chaffin, M., Bonner, B. L., & Hill, R. F. (2001). 'Family preservation and family support programs: Child maltreatment outcomes across client risk levels and program types.' *Child Abuse & Neglect, 25*(10), pp. 1269-89.
[35] Paxson, C., & Waldfogel, J. (2003). 'Welfare reforms, family resources, and child maltreatment.' *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 22*(1) pp. 85-113.
[36] Raissian, K. M., & Bullinger, L. R. (2017). 'Money matters: Does the minimum wage affect child maltreatment rates?' *Children and Youth Services Review, 72*(C) pp. 60-70; Slack, K. S., Lee, B., & Berger, L. (2007). 'Do welfare sanctions increase child protection system involvement? A cautious answer.' *Social Service Review, 81*(2) pp. 207-228.
[37] Bywaters, P., Brady, G., Sparks, T., & Bos, E. (2014). 'Child welfare inequalities: New evidence, further questions.' Invited Seminar at University of Bradford, UK; Bywaters et al. *The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect;* Pelton, L. H. (2015). 'The continuing role of material factors in child maltreatment and placement.' *Child Abuse & Neglect, 41*(0), pp. 30-39; Slack, K. S., Berger, L. M., & Noyes, J. L. (2017). 'Introduction to the special issue on the economic causes and consequences of child maltreatment.' *Children and Youth Services Review, 72* pp. 1-4.
[38] Bywaters, P. 'Inequalities in child welfare'.

We have very few universal services. What services are truly universal? Access to Plunket nurses and GPs (general practitioners). Beyond this, nearly all family support services require some form of criteria to gain entry – and even Plunket and GPs are not well resourced enough to provide more than health support. To enable them to respond in an effective manner to an increased number of referrals from the child protection system, an expansion of 'hooded services' could be positive. Hooded services offer greater levels of support to those who need it, but by a universal services provider which ensures a lack of stigma and utilises existing rapport. This access path may be stymied, however, by the need for a single point of accountability, targeting based on risk factors and not self-perceived need, and by the collection of individualised data.

Children's Teams, although based on sound logic around collaboration of services, have so far been hampered by a lack of realistic resourcing and a misplaced level of faith in coordination of services as a form of child abuse prevention. This has led to conflict between CYF and Children's Teams over the threshold for statutory intervention, with an expectation that Children's Teams will take on high risk families that they are not resourced to work with. There have also been issues of lengthy waits for services while assessments are completed, and most importantly, no increase in the extra hours of any of the specific services represented on children's teams, to actually spend more time with families.[39] Generalist teams such as this may not be well placed to deliver intensive family preservation services or highly specialised services, such as those specific to substance abusing parents or those with significant mental health problems. Collaboration takes time, and alone does not reduce child abuse and neglect. At worst, it merely increases the range of people who know about a family's problems, while releasing no new resources to support families face to face towards change.

It is important, as the CYF Review points out, to base preventive efforts on evidence. The development of parenting programmes around the world has produced several very promising approaches that are nuanced, flexible and evidence-based. Some even include a population-based component.[40] However, the full range of influences on families that can lead to abuse prevention cannot be fully captured in a standardised programme that focuses solely on individual behaviour. The provision of a parenting programme of this kind may help *some* families in *some* circumstances, but it should only be considered as one tool in a box of tools, not the total answer for every family. This problem is basically a problem of 'fit'. Does a programme fit with the unique needs and circumstances of the target family? For example, a programme might focus on change when the target family is facing a chronic problem like disability that will not 'change' as such. Prevention programme fit follows from

[39] Cann, G. (2016, June 2). 'Claims kids at risk under Team', *Hamilton News*. Retrieved from http://www.nzherald.co.nz/hamilton-news/news/article.cfm?c_id=1503366&objectid=11649408
[40] Prinz, 'Toward a population based paradigm for parenting intervention…'

assumptions about the causes of child protection system contact. As Barth et al. write in the American context:

> A review of parent training programs currently in use in most child welfare agencies concludes that the search for effective parent training programmes for child welfare families has been long and slow… they lack good fit with the general [child welfare services] population because… most parent training programs have been developed to teach parents alternatives to excessive discipline, when the vast majority of parents who receive these services have been referred for reasons other than physical abuse.[41]

In addition to family level service provision, whole communities need genuine engagement and advocacy. There are, for example, connections between social cohesion, parental depression and child abuse, suggesting that community cohesion improves abuse outcomes.[42] A number of research strands suggest that community engagement and community building form an important part of child abuse prevention, as neighborhoods influence family experiences.[43] Others argue for the place of more generalised family support approaches instead of standard programme provision, pointing out these may be more flexible, more culturally responsive and more responsive to the diversity of problems; rather than treating all people in contact with child protection systems as requiring the same response.[44] Culturally responsive services delivered by iwi, for example, may meet both these criteria. There is some suggestion of partnering with iwi to deliver these programmes in the CYF Review, which has promise. Low intensity family support – which responds to the issues that parents *actually* have, rather than providing uniform responses – can be an important preventive support. Andy Bilson, a prominent child welfare researcher, and his co-authors conclude that: 'The alternative is not prevention or early intervention… Rather, it is to genuinely engage with socially excluded communities; stand alongside them in combating poverty and social exclusion (e.g. through taking a developmental social work approach)… and work with them to develop appropriate methods of support for children and families.'[45]

[41] Barth, R., Landsverk, J., Chamberlain, P., Reid, J. B., Rolls, J. A., & Hurlburt, M. S. (2005). 'Parent-training programs in child welfare services: Planning for a more evidence-based approach to serving biological parents.' *Research on Social Work Practice, 15* p. 369.
[42] Barnhart, S., & Maguire-Jack, K. (2016). 'Single mothers in their communities: The mediating role of parenting stress and depression between social cohesion, social control and child maltreatment'. *Children and Youth Services Review, 70* pp. 37-45. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.09.003
[43] Daro, D. (2009). 'The history of science and child abuse prevention: A reciprocal relationship'. In K. Dodge & D. Coleman (Eds.). *Preventing child maltreatment: Community approaches* (pp. 9-25). New York: The Guildford Press; McDonell, J. R., Ben-Arieh, A., & Melton, G. B. (2015). 'Strong communities for children: Results of a multi-year community-based initiative to protect children from harm.' *Child Abuse & Neglect, 41,* pp. 79–96; Nadan, Y., Spilsbury, J. C., & Korbin, J. E. (2015). 'Culture and context in understanding child maltreatment: Contributions of intersectionality and neighborhood-based research.' *Child Abuse & Neglect, 41*, pp. 40–48.
[44] Featherstone, B. (2006). 'Rethinking family support in the current policy context.' *British Journal of Social Work, 36*(1) pp. 5-19.
[45] Bilson, A., Cant, R. L., Harries, M., & Thorpe, D. H. (2013). 'A Longitudinal Study of Children Reported to the Child Protection Department in Western Australia.' *British Journal of Social Work, 45*(3) p. 788.

At the other end of the spectrum, some families will require very intensive family preservation services that rely on a very low caseload (one Australian model recommends a caseload of two families per practitioner).[46]

This is an area where the social investment paradigm could become unstuck. It assumes that by providing family services of some kind or another, problems can be 'fixed' and that we will know those problems are fixed when families no longer need help (or no longer impose a future cost on the state). The implicit assumption here is that independence from the state is always a good thing – but this is at odds with the many families who require ongoing support to parent, partly because parenting is tough and everyone needs support at some point to do it, and because some family difficulties are complex, chronic, or not amenable to change. By assuming that there is 'no legitimate dependence' on the state, the social investment paradigm could generate mismatches between the services offered and the needs of recipients. It also tacitly judges target families as 'failures' when ongoing support is required, and may in reality not align with being 'child centred' where to be so may result in more cost to the state.[47]

Social investment's shift in focus to outcomes for children and their families, instead of what process outputs they have received, is a positive move. But what should count as the criteria for success of those outcomes, and how we might obtain them, is contentious. Countries with successful child welfare systems have much more robust universal protections than we do, such as poverty and universal family support systems.[48] These systems are founded on a child welfare orientation that recognises that most people need support to parent well, so early intervention is provided as a matter of course.[49] In addition to these basic social protections, these countries also have hooded services which are partially targeted but provided as part of universal services, so can be accessed without stigma by building on an existing rapport with service providers. This is important because personal change relies on a relationship of trust.[50] In light of the problem that a large proportion of abuse is never notified, prevention should be targeted at not only those deemed statistically to be 'at risk' or flagged in some way, but that remain open to the broader population. Of course, some targeted services are needed in addition to this, but both are required to provide a robust prevention system.

[46] New South Wales Government (2010). *Intensive family preservation service model.* New South Wales Government Human Services Community Services.
[47] Peacock, M., Bissell, P., & Owen, J. (2014). 'Dependency denied: Health inequalities in the neoliberal era.' *Social Science and Medicine* (118) pp. 173-180.
[48] See for instance the European examples in Sethi, D., Bellis, M., Hughes, K., Gilbert, R., Mitis, F., & Galea, G. (Eds). (2015). *European report on preventing child maltreatment.* Copenhagen, Denmark: World Health Organisation.
[49] Featherstone, B. (2006). 'Rethinking family support in the current policy context.' *British Journal of Social Work, 36*(1) pp. 5-19; Gilbert, N., Parton, N., & Skivenes, M. (2011). *Child protection systems: International trends and orientations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[50] Spratt, T., & Callan, J. (2004). 'Parents' views on social work interventions in child welfare cases.' *British Journal of Social Work, 34*(2) pp. 199-224.

The CYF Review demonstrates a clear intent to allow low-risk families to access services, insofar as it recognises that family members with high needs can undermine the wider wellbeing of the whole family, which justifies prevention before problems escalate. This is promising, because it potentially broadens the realm of responsibility of the new Ministry for Vulnerable Children | Oranga Tamariki beyond child abuse investigation. Yet there remain challenges over how these services will actually be accessed, provided and funded, as this requires more robust universal services, more community approaches, more hooded services, and a wider range of targeted prevention services that are able to respond to the diversity of families and their issues.

4.4: Over-reliance on market delivery

The expectation that market mechanisms can provide the full range of required services through third party contractors reflects a heightened belief in the reduction of the role of the state, and a faith in market-like arrangements to deliver effectively the various types of services required. Whether or not this can meet the needs of prevention is questionable, because market drivers of supply, demand and profit are unlikely to be responsive to the range and complexity of human problems encountered in the child welfare domain.

An over-reliance on markets introduces a new array of risks. It could lead to the selection of clients who are more amenable to 'positive change' as determined by the social investment approach, leaving others excluded from services. It could make the functioning of NGOs tenuous, because the diminished certainty of funding does not enable NGOs to develop and maintain solid organisational and staff infrastructure. Instrumental governance structures such as this heighten the distance between the state and the provision of services, lowering direct state provision. Premised on a rhetoric of the community taking more responsibility for child abuse, this outsourcing of service provision reduces the state's role in areas where important human rights may be more directly assured by the state. If we rely on the market to provide these diverse services, they may never come. This also relates to how much money will be left in the kitty once prevention services are sourced.

It can be difficult to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of lower-end hooded services, because if access is open to a range of people, including both high- and low-risk, then it becomes challenging to prove the lowered future cost (or forward liability) for those deemed low-risk (who may nevertheless experience harm without intervention). The costs of these 'false negatives' from a probabilistic perspective is not known.

Meanwhile, the provision of expensive tertiary services to multi-problem families is a risky venture for NGOs or private companies if their effectiveness is judged by the reduction of forward liability, or impact targets for lower renotifications. This may create perverse incentives to not notify children if reduction in notifications is linked to an NGO's contract. Social impact bonds seem to struggle for the same reason: the most needy are also the most financially risky. In the child protection context, a market-building approach to service provision could have the same result: providers might target only those most amenable to cost effective improvement, whereas those deemed the most high- and low-risk miss out. Market mechanisms might not, therefore, have the desired impact. Families who find themselves without service provision may proceed rapidly to child removal, reducing the opportunities for support and change.

4.5: Measuring outcomes

Many of these issues reflect the fact that prevention of child abuse and neglect and the new social investment approach are conflated in the current proposals. Reductions in renotifications, future welfare and criminal justice liability are stated as the desired outcomes of social investment in this context, but these all have tenuous relationships with reductions in the incidence of child abuse. Even with the use of the integrated data infrastructure that can track individuals through time, the ability to draw inferences over long time gaps with administrative data is problematic. Many factors not well captured in data influence a life over time. Accordingly, making realistic conclusions about the veracity of services many years after they have been provided is difficult. Constructing the success of prevention as a reduction in economic costs to the state also contains implicit and questionable criteria about what constitutes a 'good life', as well as an assumption that independence is the ideal state/family relationship. It assumes any kind of state support is undesirable, despite the fact that many people need support to parent, and raising of children can be made either easier or harder by the broad policy landscape it happens within.

How success is measured in social investment requires careful consideration. The attraction of the new metric-driven social investment paradigm is that the effects of a standardised prevention programme can be measured quantitatively, then compared to future outcomes. But human behaviour and experience is not that straightforward. There are two reasons this approach may not result in effective preventive services. Firstly, the way that the effectiveness of prevention programmes is measured may not adequately capture their full effects. Secondly, such programmes are alone unlikely

to reduce the more general causes of child abuse and neglect relating to deprivation and community need.

For example, if a programme succeeds in improving the relationships between parents and their children, but the local school provides poor education and the local community provides few jobs, then those children could end up on benefits and the programme will be deemed a failure. Similarly, if a programme succeeds in boosting the confidence of a sole parent and her parenting improves accordingly, but she gets involved with a violent partner who prompts a notification to child protection services, then (again) the programme will be deemed a failure. Conversely, if improving economic conditions improve the life outcomes of a child, this could be incorrectly ascribed to the impacts of a programme, because the ability to control for other factors across a person's lifespan is tenuous.

The appropriateness of using benefit receipt as an indicator of success in life is also problematic – if a disabled child and her parents require benefits for their whole life, is this a failure within the current social investment paradigm? To avoid these misattributions of causal influence, it is important to incorporate a range of evaluative measures, both short and long term, and including both administrative, direct and qualitative perceptions of people receiving services. This is important not only for the proposed standardised programmes, but also when considering the benefits of less standardised programmes, such as client-led family support, improvements in income, housing or access to parental services, or community building. Careful debate about the hoped for outcomes and their assumptions about what 'good outcomes' look like is important.

Some of these issues have been explored by Ernst & Young in a commissioned report on the development of an actuarial model to support the social investment approach. The authors of the Ernst & Young report take quite a different approach to the CYF Review to conceptualising both vulnerability and the outcomes used to evaluate success. Firstly, they 'emphasise the need to consider the child in the context of their environment: parents, carers, siblings, family, and community, including whānau, hapū and iwi where relevant. This requires measurement of the wellbeing of these entities in a child's life as they are key contributing factors for the child's own wellbeing.'[51] This focus on the child in context – one whose wellbeing is delivered essentially via their families and communities, as opposed to a stand-alone individual – flows through the report. This differs in tone from the CYF Review, which considers children as essentially separate from their family and community context.

[51] Ernst & Young (2015, December 4). *Investment approach for vulnerable children* p. 5.

There is also a difference in their definitions of desirable outcomes. The CYF Review focuses closely on reduction in welfare, criminal justice and notifications as the desired long term outcomes that would be used as measures of success. The Ernst & Young report expands the range of outcomes, and how they are measured, to include some that relate more broadly to social need. In light of the difficulties of inferring connections between administratively derived variables over time, the Ernst & Young report suggests short-term outcome measures as well as long-term. Its proposed actuarial model 'seeks to understand the development of risk, need, outcome and cost over the short and long term for individuals. The actuarial model proposed includes a measure of liability, a measure of well-being and a measure of need.'[52] It specifically recommends that 'that non-financial measures associated with short-term and expected long-term change in well-being should be used to help put financial measures in context where possible.'[53]

The Ernst & Young report also takes a much wider view of prevention than that suggested in the CYF Review, and shows more cognisance of the fact that harm should be conceptualised more broadly than just child abuse, as it often coalesces and is interrelated to, other social problems. They state, for example, that 'vulnerability of a child is not just associated with a child protection or youth justice event or risk. There are those in the population who don't have contact with CYF and [Youth Justice] but who could still be classified as vulnerable… vulnerability can manifest because of many other issues associated with disadvantage across multiple dimensions including, but not limited to, income, housing health, education, situation and behaviour.'[54] Because this conceptualisation of vulnerability is wider than that proposed by the CYF Review, including a recognition of community and family context, this leads the Ernst & Young report to propose an actuarial model that does not only focus on child abuse, but also on the promotion of wellbeing. It also focuses not only on long-term fiscal outcomes for children, but on immediate, short- and long-term social outcomes, with a particular focus on children meeting developmental milestones. It uses not only individual variables in the actuarial model, but also community and context measures. This leads to a concept of 'foundational milestones' to be built into the actuarial model, which includes access to basic shelter, food security, basic health, basic financial cover (such as income level or a poverty measure), and feeling loved.[55]

By including short- and long-term outcomes, as well as measures derived from close to the subject, the Ernst & Young report offers a more fine-grained and realistic approach to what should be taken as evidence of success. It suggests a broader view of what should count as success by including wellbeing and needs as important goals.

[52] Ernst & Young p. 172.
[53] Ernst & Young p. 175.
[54] Ernst & Young p. 39.
[55] Ernst & Young p. 40.

Crucially, it connects the broader social conditions relating to poverty and community wellbeing to the experiences of children and includes them as part of what is needed to promote wellbeing including prevention of child abuse and neglect. They point out that to build an actuarial model that considers all these factors would be challenging, because administrative data only reflects the points where people come into contact with services, so it might miss some people and not cover community factors very accurately. Nevertheless, it responds to some of the criticisms relating to context and measurement of the Expert Panel reports' outlines of the social investment approach.

4.6: The single point of accountability and information sharing

Services that are brokered from a 'single point of accountability' as proposed by the CYF Review report must, by definition, rely on a method for identifying and assessing high-risk families as appropriate for targeted service delivery by a central agency. This may be unwieldy in practice, as a central decision-maker may not have all the information needed to make an adequate decision about entry to preventive services. If done so by use of a risk score relating only to child abuse and neglect, and in the absence or reduction of adequate services, then this will essentially become a gate-keeping exercise that – with limited resourcing – will raise the bar to provide services and exacerbate the inequities attached to false positives and false negatives in the risk score approach. If families are considered low-risk, then they might not be able to access support services, even though the need for support may be legitimate. At the other end of the risk spectrum, families that are high-risk – or, from the social investment perspective, high future cost – may need more high-end tertiary services than are currently available. In the area of child abuse and neglect, if probabilistic risk scores are generated based on child protection agency data, they do not provide a good enough proxy for abuse incidence across the population.[56] Creating and communicating the existence of a high-risk category can both stigmatise families and produce disengagement.

The sharing and analysis of administrative data to target particular people to receive services inherent in the social investment approach will rely on the new information sharing arrangements. These relate to the Vulnerable Children's Hub ('The Hub'), the vulnerable children's information system, and the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act amendments. These arrangements, together, will allow for a greater sharing of information without client consent than ever before. The justification that this is required in order to prevent child deaths, offer preventive services and measure their efficacy is largely unfounded. Rigorous evaluation of services and local, yet systematic, ways of determining service admittance are both possible without the

[56] Keddell, E. (2016). 'Substantiation, decision-making and risk prediction in child protection systems.' *Policy Quarterly, 12*(2) p. 46.

level of personal information sharing currently proposed that may deter some people from useful service provision. [57] The numbers of families about whom information is shared in this way is far greater than those who will go on to do serious harm to their children, and increasing the numbers of children notified can simply create 'more wood for the trees', instead of lead to better identification of high risk families. Munro notes this when she states: 'The basic problem is that by magnifying the amount of data being collected so much, there is a risk that cases of serious abuse will be hidden in the deluge of data about lower level concerns. The reality of this risk is well-evidenced by experiences in other areas of data collection.'[58] Data developments and information-sharing that contribute to risk management are important but they do not prevent abuse. What does prevent abuse is changing the conditions families live in, and working with parents on the stressors and life histories that affect their parenting.

4.7: Resourcing and budgeting

Understanding what proportion of the budget is going to be available to purchase preventive services is another important question when considering the success of the proposals to prevent child abuse and neglect. $347.8 million was committed to the CYF Review in the 2016 budget. However, with $144.9 million needed just to fund cost pressures and increase demand for children in foster care, and $199.9 million ring-fenced for other ambitious elements of the reforms – such as the transformation programme, the creation of an advocacy service, caregiver recruitment, training and support, the creation of caregiver standards and transition services, and raising the age of care – it's hard to see what may be left over for prevention, particularly when some of the key prevention domains lie outside of the new structure for the Ministry of Vulnerable Children | Oranga Tamariki. While $141 million is 'in contingency', the funding of preventive services, let alone improving universal services or social protections, seems unlikely to be well resourced.

The Children's Team framework aims to better coordinate assessments and services for children who sit below the threshold of CYF services. The current model does not offer more services – that is, it does not offer any of the individual practitioners and their employers more resources to work directly with families, and partly due to this there have been some problems with recruitment, retention and participation from NGOs (as described above). Direct services, especially those with high practitioner-to-client ratios are expensive and require solid organisational infrastructure. New funding to universal services may also be required, especially if more hooded services are needed. Poverty alleviation needs to pay attention to income adequacy and housing access.

[57] Munro, E. (2007a). 'Confidentiality in a preventive child welfare system.' *Ethics and Social Welfare, 1*(1) pp. 41–55; Munro, E. (2007b). 'The dangers of information sharing.' *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand, 31* pp. 41–55.
[58] Munro, E. (2007b). 'The dangers of information sharing', p. 52.

4.8: The emphasis on child removal

Finally, the potential for a lack of adequate resourcing and construction of prevention systems, when combined with the stronger imperative to remove children earlier and place them in permanent care arrangements, means that a strong 'child rescue' outcome is likely. Child rescue approaches valorise foster care despite the mixed evidence regarding its outcomes, downplay the harm of removal itself, and diminish the importance of family and community relationships. This can result in a simplistic equation of prevention of harm with child removal, rather than prevention as stopping abuse before it occurs. The latter is more holistically preventive, as it reduces harm to the child, and is respectful of both parents and children's rights to family life. Prevention approaches must recognise that parenting is a difficult and demanding job which requires social and material support to avoid a range of harms to children – with abuse and neglect being one of them. This way of conceiving of prevention as using removal to reduce the forward liability emphasises future cost-savings (which removal may not prevent anyway) at the expense of finding workable family and community solutions that support both parents and children's rights to family life. For Māori, this emphasis is likely to be particularly pernicious, due to the overrepresentation of Māori children in the child welfare system. In the CYF Review, this disproportionality is mentioned multiple times, yet the emphasis on swift removal as the solution shows a diminishing of the role of whānau, hapū and iwi in the review proposals. There is also some mention of partnering with iwi to provide prevention services, but what happens after removal remains a key concern. With the broad emphasis on removal as a key remedy, lack of consideration of contextual issues that also affect Māori more than other groups means that the rates of removal for Māori are likely to continue their increasing disproportionality (from 50% of children in fostercare in 2011 to 60% in 2015).[59]

[59] Child Youth and Family Service. (2016). 'Key statistics and information for media.' Retrieved from http://www.cyf.govt.nz/about-us/key-statistics/

5: Pulling it all together

What is striking about the CYF Review is that, even though the deprivation and disadvantage of people in contact with child welfare services is clearly outlined, the proposed solutions do not seek to address this. The CYF Review proposes to provide preventive individualised services to families and, if this is not successful, to remove children more swiftly to foster care. There is mention of preventive services provided to avoid such outcomes, but the paucity of detail (so far) about what, who or how much will be provided, the mention of Children's Teams and universal services as ways to provide prevention despite their current challenges, and the lack of attention to deprivation as a contributor, leaves many questions unanswered.

The threat to impose speedier early removals after preventive efforts have failed has remarkable parallels with British policy reforms in the late 2000s. As Featherstone, Morris and White write, when intensive intervention programmes and child removals are implemented alongside the contraction of state protections and services, the result was 'a future-oriented project building on elements of social investment and moral underclass discourses. It incorporates an unforgiving approach to time and to parents—improve quickly or within the set time limits. It is shored up by a particularly potent neuroscientific argument which has been widely critiqued from within neuroscience itself (Bruer, 1999; Uttal, 2011) but is unchallenged in current policy.'[60] This lead to a rapid increase in children in the United Kingdom being removed and a far greater use of adoption as permanent option.[61]

The tone of the UK reforms and the CYF Review seems to be that families will be provided a chance via a fairly narrow range of targeted preventive programmes, or referred to universal services that are unlikely to provide the depth of service required. Should these fail, children will be removed. This is framed as ensuring that systems are 'child centered' – that is, in line with children's needs for stability and developmental needs. But nowhere are the realities of parenting within resource-poor contexts taken into account, nor the damage of removal to children acknowledged. Foster care while at times necessary, is not a panacea. As Thomas Morton provocatively argues:

> Removing a child to foster care violates the most basic trust existing in a child's life that, whatever else may happen, the caregiver will be physically constant… Once the child is removed, the child remains suspicious about the permanence of the caregiver even if returned home. If it happened once, it can happen again. I am not arguing that removal is never necessary, rather that it must be balanced against the certain harm created by removal.[62]

[60] Featherstone, B., Morris, K., & White, S. (2013). 'A marriage made in hell: Early intervention meets child protection.' *British Journal of Social Work, 44*(7) p. 1739.
[61] Parton, N. (2016). 'An "authoritarian neoliberal" approach to child welfare and protection?' *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work, 28*(2) pp. 7-8.
[62] Morton, T. (2016, March 15). '"Foster care vs. Family Preservation" is the Wrong Debate'. *The Chronicle of Social Change*. Retrieved from https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/featured/16584/16584

Rushing to remove more children creates a different sort of problem for children, one that for some families can be avoided if we undertake prevention in a systematic, well-resourced and nuanced manner: 'We need change because more and more we have seen a decoupling of the child from their family in a "child focused" orientation. This orientation concentrates on the child as an individual with an independent relation to the state, thus ignoring the most fundamental of insights about our relational natures'.[63] Such a view is particularly pertinent for Māori children, for whom the central emphasis of children as intrinsically connected to their whānau and hapū has been central to critiques of New Zealand's child welfare system since the 1980s until the present day.[64]

An alternative view of prevention would not conceive of social investment in isolation from the wider social conditions that contribute to harm – from poverty, impoverished neighbourhoods with poor housing, high transience, and ethnic discrimination. Social investment that was genuinely 'social' would involve more diverse criteria for judging the system's success by including measures of people's experiences of services, measures of change in family relationships, and measures of child wellbeing. It would also accept that the prevention of child abuse should be aimed at a much larger proportion of the population than those captured by child protection system statistics, and that the prevention of child abuse is best conceptualised as just one of a number of 'coalescing goals'.[65]

Without this wider conceptualisation of social and state support, the purpose of intervention is individual change in order to reduce the costs and renotifications associated with that individual, rather than the creation of a social policy landscape that values children and supports parenting.

[63] Featherstone, B., White, S., & Morris, K. (2014). *Re-imagining child protection: Towards humane social work with families.* Bristol, UK: Policy Press.
[64] Ministerial Advisory Committee (1988). *PUAO-TE-ATA-TU (day break): The report of the ministerial advisory committee on a Maori perspective for the department of social welfare.* Department of Social Welfare. Wellington: New Zealand.
[65] Prinz, 'Toward a population based paradigm for parenting intervention…'

6: Recommendations

In light of the preceding analysis, this report makes the following recommendations to be considered as the Modernising Child, Youth and Family reforms are rolled out over the coming years:

- Include poverty alleviation and housing access within the remit of the reforms. Index benefits and working for families tax credits to median wages, remove the hours of work requirement for the in-work tax credit, and improve access to low cost, long term secure housing.
- Improve access to universal services as suggested earlier, but review the current scope of universal services with a view to increasing their ability to offer more hooded services. Make hooded services available to anyone who self-defines as in need.
- Include community development initiatives in the range of prevention approaches offered, and include measures of community context in the actuarial model used to evaluate success. Include short-term, mid-term, and long-term measures of child wellbeing in the actuarial model.
- Improve access to mental health and substance abuse services for parents.
- Ensure that the range of direct parenting programmes on offer are sufficiently diverse, culturally appropriate and well resourced, including high-intensity family preservation programmes.
- If an actuarial approach is used, as proposed in the Ernst & Young report, include alternative ways of measuring policy and programme effectiveness other than reduction of forward liability. Evaluations can be undertaken that don't rely on this measure. Prevention outcomes should be just that: reductions in child abuse and improvements in a range of other aspects of wellbeing. This may or may not result in reduction in the future cost to the state.
- Reconsider the use of centralised, individually linked data to establish evidence of effectiveness. For example, by working with NGOs to improve their own research capacity, or building more researcher-NGO partnerships, so that rigorous research into effectiveness can be undertaken without requiring centralised, linked data aggregation by the state.
- Re-focus the reforms by recognising that prevention before child removal is just as important as what happens after it.

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About The Author

Emily is a senior lecturer in social work at the University of Otago. Her practice experience is in child protection and family support social work, and her research interests include various aspects of child welfare policy and practice including: decision-making, politics, systems design, income poverty, risk prediction and data use, and inequalities in system contact. She blogs with her friends at Reimagining Social Work <http://www.reimaginingsocialwork.nz> and tweets at @EmilyK100.

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