

FOREWORD

This 24th issue of the *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand* is devoted to the second Social Policy, Research and Evaluation Conference, "What Works?", convened by the Ministry of Social Development in November 2004. The conference, emphasising evidence-based policy and practice, succeeded in bringing together the policy, provider, research and evaluation communities. Issue 24 does the same, with a selection of keynote addresses and refereed papers developed from conference presentations.

The three keynote speakers addressed the question of "What works?" from their three distinct social and cultural perspectives and concerns: New Zealand, First Nations of Canada, and the United Kingdom. In their papers, they consider the historical and political complexities inherent in providing an answer to this question.

Mason Durie, Professor of Māori Research and Development at Massey University, asks the question, "Do policies based on race or ethnicity work?" He answers it with a review of race-based policy across New Zealand's history and an assessment of 21st-century research findings. There are interesting parallels between Mason Durie's paper and the paper written by Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, and Nico Trocmé of the University of Toronto. In particular, they share an historical perspective and a focus on racially and ethnically oriented policies. Blackstock and Trocmé's paper, reflecting their practitioner-based concerns, draws on the lived experience of First Nations children and argues that these children's needs call for a response that comes out of their own community.

Helen Roberts is Professor of Child Health at the City University, London, and head of its Child Health Research and Policy Unit, which examines evidence-based health and social care of children, and the gap between evidence and practice. Her paper focuses on the real complexities of social interventions, and the political complexities that may be encountered when implementing what the evidence supports. The paper by Kristin Liabo, a Research Fellow in the Child Health Research and Policy Unit, is on a closely related topic. Kristin Liabo writes about her participation in the "What Works for Children?" project and the project's efforts to improve the links between research and practice by making relevant findings accessible and usable, and identifying the specific research needs of service planners and practitioners.

This issue's theme relating to the needs of children continues in a paper by Ross Mackay on the impact of family structure and family change on child outcomes. The paper provides a selective review of the literature, focusing on an exploration of some possible mechanisms linking parents' separation to outcomes for their children.

Also addressing the theme of outcomes for children, Paul Callister studies the working hours of families with preschool children with a concern for the impact that parents' long working hours may have on their children. The paper examines the changes between 1986 and 2001 in the paid working hours of these families, particularly the patterns relating to family structure and the age and gender of the parents. The patterns are interesting in that some of the averages hide considerable differences between subgroups. The paper goes on to discuss possible reasons for the changes, and possible impacts on unpaid work (including childcare) and even child outcomes, and explores policy options for curbing long hours.

The three authors of a paper on the Performance-Based Research Fund – Jonathan Boston, Brenden Mischewski and Roger Smyth – combine backgrounds in academia, policy making and practice. Their assessment of the likely impact of the PBRF is positive, anticipating improvements in the number and quality of research publications, and enhanced teaching quality and community service by teaching staff. In particular, they found that evaluation results indicate that the performance of the social sciences is above the university average, a good sign for social policy's evidence base.

The paper on social cohesion – another cross-sectoral collaboration – by Paul Spoonley, Robin Peace, Andrew Butcher and Damian O'Neill, reviews definitions and approaches to social cohesion used in different countries, explores ways of measuring social cohesion, and outlines an indicator framework that can be used for determining the social cohesion outcomes of New Zealand's immigration settlement strategy.

A team of researchers from the Centre for Social Research and Evaluation in the Ministry of Social Development – John Jensen, Sathi Sathiyandra, Mike Rochford, Davina Jones, Vasantha Krishnan and Keith McLeod – have developed a way of estimating for people with disability what their level of employment would have been in the absence of their disability. This allows them to assess the effect on employment of each type and seriousness of disability. Their paper reveals some unanticipated patterns that suggest that there may be more potential than expected for raising the level of full-time employment for people with disability.

The “What Works?” conference provided a venue for a wide range of themes and many excellent presentations. I hope you will enjoy reading the papers, based on some of these presentations that we have published here. Several additional “What Works?” papers are planned for publication in Issue 25.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne Jackson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Anne Jackson
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Centre for Social Research and Evaluation
Te Pokapū Rangahau Arotake Hapori