

Families in Focus

Newsletter

Issue 10: June 2009

Editorial from Director, Jan Pryor

This is the last editorial I will write, since as you know I have passed the mantle of Director of the centre to Paul Jose, ably supported by Jeremy Robertson our deputy Director. This is because the job of being Chief Commissioner at the Families Commission makes it impossible to do justice to the Directorship.

Since the last editorial, we have heard that we were not successful in gaining funding for the continuation of the Youth Connectedness project. We are nonetheless very busy, carrying out analyses on the treasure trove of data we have 'in the bank'. That will take us to September, by which time we hope to have found funding to enable Carla Crespo to continue her invaluable work with us. We of course hope to gain funding for other projects, so that we can continue the work of the Centre.

I will continue on one day a week as a Senior Researcher, working mainly on the Growing Up in New Zealand Study. This longitudinal project is going very well; the main recruitment for 7,600 babies and their families is under way, and it promises to be a landmark study for decades to come. I will also continue to work with my Ph.D students, Magda, Christopher, and Rebecca, and to work with Carla and the others where possible on data analyses for the Youth Connectedness project.

I want to thank again the many supporters, partners, and collaborators who have worked with the Centre while I have been Director. I want to note, too, that without the generosity and support of Sir Roy McKenzie and his family we would not have been as successful as we have been.

Jan Pryor

Current Research

Growing Up in New Zealand Study

Jan Pryor is the domain leader for family and whānau for this study. We have recruited the first 200 families who form the Leading Light Group. This group is the one with which we trial processes and measures. The recruitment of the full sample (7,600) starts in February 2009.

Parenting Through Separation Evaluation

We have finished collecting data from parents who have attended the parenting through separation course. We have also interviewed a range of key stakeholders and surveyed programme providers. This has provided us with a wealth of very interesting information on the programme. A report has been submitted to the Ministry of Justice and will be finalised soon.

Relationship Services DV research

Jeremy is helping Relationship Services with a project that aims to identify best practices used by facilitators of DV programmes.

Poster presentation by Jeremy at the recent *Early Childhood Research Conference, Wellington*. Parental decision making in relation to the use of Early Childhood Education Services.

Youth Connectedness Project Update

Final data collection for the third phase is complete, and we have linked the three data bases so that longitudinal analyses can begin. We have 1809 participants remaining after three years of data collection from a total of 2174. Early high-order analyses suggest that our hypotheses are being confirmed; in particular, connectedness to families, school, peers and communities predicts wellbeing across time. Importantly, wellbeing does not predict connectedness over time, suggesting strongly that modifiable aspects of connectedness can be identified in order to increase the wellbeing of young people. However, simply trying to increase wellbeing by for example promoting self esteem, is not effective.

Our task between now and September, when the project ends, is to analyse and write up the data and to disseminate it. Our resources are meagre; however we have a person on secondment from Ministry of Youth Development (Bhagavan Srinivasa) who is focusing on the educational data. Carla Crespo is focusing in analyses of family data. We have two graduate students from Psychology who will work on aspects of the data over summer.

Writing and Dissemination update:

Researchers are working on papers covering family structure, changes, diversity, Body image, Family rituals, and Family transitions.

Youth Connectedness Conference and Seminar Presentations

- NZCER (joint Project partners) presented selection of their 42 youth participants' "Digital stories", Penthouse, October. A further presentation to interested parties was held on 9 December.
- Presentation on Project findings on school and community to Rotorua District Council-organised Seminar in November. Presentation undertaken by researchers Carla Crespo and Jane Gilbert.
- Jan Pryor presented at the National Council on Family Relations Conference in November in Littlerock, Arkansas, U.S.A.
- Australian Association for Research in Education Conference presentation, NZCER, December. Jane Gilbert.
- Stakeholders' Advisory Board Meeting - 14 November 2008. Good turnout and interaction between researchers, NGOs' and Government Agencies.
- Family survey was sent to the families of our 1,800 Youth Connectedness participants, along with our *Panui* (Project Newsletter) in November 2008. A good response from parents/caregivers was received.

- Nathan is currently preparing a presentation based on results from the two principals surveys from the YCP and establishing relationships between these responses and the youth responses to find any patterns, trends, indicators or higher-level relationships which may exist and which may be illuminating, interesting or otherwise provide curious fascination.

Staff Update

- Nicholas Ryan left the Centre in November 2008.
- Nathan McCluskey was appointed as Research Fellow for the Centre and joined in January 2009.
- Bhagavan Srinivasa is on Secondment from MYD through to June 2009, working with the Youth Connectedness data.
- Bill Siddells is with School of Government and Debbie Levy has taken up parts of the role as project co-ordinator for the YC project.

PhD Students

Rebecca Graham is completing her thesis on Roles in Stepfamilies.

Magda Kielpiowski

Time 2 data collection, entry and screening have been completed as planned. Longitudinal models are being developed, tested and written up. The work progresses according to timetable.

Presentations:

- **Annual Conference of the New Zealand Psychological Society**, Christchurch 2008. Kielpiowski, M. M., Pryor, J. E., & Jose P. E. (2008, August). Silent conflict and children's outcomes: Unidirectional or bidirectional Influence?
- **Annual conference of the 10th Australasian Institute of Family**

Studies Conference, Melbourne, Australia, 2008.

Kielpiowski, M. M., Pryor, J. E., & Jose P. E. (2008, July). Inter-parental conflict and children's outcomes: The pros and cons of silence. Full text available at <http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/afrc10/kielpikowskipaper.pdf>.

Journal articles

- Kielpiowski, M.M. & Pryor, J.E. (2008). Silent parental conflict: Parents' perspective. *Journal of Family Studies Special Double Issue on Innovative Approaches to Family Violence*, 14(2-3), 217-227.
- The Special Issue has been published as a book as well as a double issue of the *Journal* - it has an ISBN in addition to the usual ISSN.

Chris Low is making good progress in his study of the impact of divorce on young people in Malaysia.

Update from Research Fellow Nathan McCluskey

With the oral defence of my PhD thesis in April came the good news that I had passed with minor amendments due last month. I now await acceptance of these within the next fortnight.

This research has resulted in significant funding from the Swedish Research Council, Gothenburg University, the RMC and SOG all contributing to my attendance at the International Comparative Party Pledge Group Seminar and Workshop 2009 in Gothenburg, Sweden this month where I will be both a presenter and discussant on multiple panels. My research represents a first of its kind in that it assesses intra-national policy implementation across two different electoral systems and therefore illustrates the impact different electoral systems have on pledge fulfilment within the same national context. One of the objectives of the Workshop is to produce an edited book with chapters representing different countries. Obviously, the New Zealand chapter has been offered to me and this is

an exciting prospect as such a book would fill a clear gap in the literature and therefore will not simply be a 'one of the many' on the subject, but be quite unique.

In other activity since starting at the Centre, I have been involved in setting up a collaborative network of youth researchers which I have coined The Youth Group™. While we have only met once so far, we have an ongoing discussion online and a number of exciting ideas which must remain in the bag at this stage, but watch this space. Other members of the group are accomplished researchers in the area of youth psychology and behaviour from Massey, NZCER and Weltec.

I have also been involved in numerous meetings and presentations with and to various government organisations in downtown Wellington. These have been of varying value in terms of ongoing research support, but they have all contributed towards a tight learning curve.

I have proposed a number of research projects for new funding, but without success at this point. Marsden and Nga Pae both found us in the majority group who didn't get funding and no clear indication as to how the applications needed to be different in order to have been more successful, but that is the nature of the beast. We currently await a SPEaR application and I am still working on a Todd proposal. It is my hope that The Youth Group™ will put a project proposal together over the coming months to blow the competition out of the water.

There are a lot of other little things going on with preparation for lecturing in the second semester and practical family court field activities etc which manage to ensure that things never get boring.

Events

Roy McKenzie Centre Annual Lecture

The 2008 annual lecture was held on 20 November. Guest Lecturer, Professor Richie Poulton, worked as a Clinical Psychologist in New Zealand and Australia before completing a PhD at UNSW in Sydney. He returned to New Zealand in 1995 to become Deputy Director, then Director, from 2000, of the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study, having first worked on the Study as an interviewer in 1985/86.

In 2007 he led the establishment of the National Centre for Lifecourse research, of which he is Co-Director. He has published 150+ scientific papers, with many appearing in leading international journals. His research interests include developmental psychopathology, gene-environment interplay in the prediction of complex disorders, and psychosocial determinants of physical health. Professor Poulton's lecture focused on 'NZ families from a lifecourse perspective'.



Professor Richie Poulton and Dr Jan Pryor.

Upcoming Events

Youth Connectedness Seminar

A two-day seminar will be held on the findings from the Youth Connectedness project. Youth 2007 will also be involved. Senior Researchers from both longitudinal studies will present their findings. Key note speaker is Professor Michael Resnick, University of Minnesota. Further details are on the Roy McKenzie Centre and Youth Connectedness websites.

Wellington: 9/10 July 2009

Auckland: 6/7 July – organised by Youth 2007

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Families in Transition Seminar

The Roy McKenzie Centre and the Department of Psychology at Auckland University are holding two one-day seminars to present recent research on 'Families in Transition'.

Presentations will cover issues of parenting after separation, education programmes for couples who separate, impacts of parental separation on children and issues of stepfamily formation. There will be a minimal fee to attend and the seminars will be aimed at a wide audience.

Wellington Seminar
7 August at Wellington Convention Centre.

Auckland Seminar
17 August at Auckland University. Tamaki Campus.

Further information available on the Roy McKenzie Centre website or email Debbie.levy@vuw.ac.nz

(<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/mckenzie-centre/news/upcoming/index.aspx>).

