



Greetings from Director Jan Pryor

The new year has started at the fast pace to which we are becoming accustomed in the Centre! Our main efforts continue to go into the Connectedness in Young New Zealanders FRST project, and there is an update on that in this issue from Chris Holland.

We are particularly excited about our two new staff members. Dr Ieti Lima has joined us as the Pacific Research Fellow. He is already involved in the FRST project, and is making valuable connections with the Pacific Island communities in the Wellington area.

Dr Jeremy Robertson has joined us as a Senior Research Fellow. Jeremy's background is in family and social research. He has in the past been with the Office for the Commissioner for Children, and latterly in the Crime and Justice Centre here at Victoria. In between those appointments he was in London at the Thomas Coram Institute, where he did his Ph.D on stepfamilies.

We also have two new Ph.D students. Rebecca Graham has come from Sydney to take up our targeted Ph.D scholarship focusing on stepfamilies. Magda Kielpiowski worked with me last year on an honours project looking at non-verbal conflict from the perspective of parents, and her Ph.D will carry this work further.

Sadly, our Research Fellow Josie Roberts has resigned and leaves at the end of February. Josie has been a wonderful, enthusiastic and talented colleague and we will miss her badly.

At the end of last year we held our first Sir Roy McKenzie inaugural lecture. It was given by Dr Rajen Prasad, the Chief Families Commissioner and was very successful. See photos in this issue.

We have several project proposals in the pipeline, and hope to find out about several of them soon. They will balance the 'family' side of the Centre. I hope that in the next newsletter we can bring you news of these.

We are also planning more seminars. None of these are definite yet, so we will let you know as they become confirmed.

Overall, it feels as if we are increasingly getting our feet on the ground as time passes. We appreciate the continuing support and interest we get from our colleagues and friends - thank you for that.

Jan

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Advisory Board Member Jeff Sanders

CEO, Relationship Services Whakawhanaungatanga

In the often heated debate last year around definitions of family and of “family values”, the primacy of family relationships seemed to get lost in the rhetoric. Strong and healthy family relationships are surely the basis for strong and healthy communities. As a society we need to keep focussing on how we can support and sustain family relationships.

A difficulty for many of us working in this area has been the paucity of objective information on what makes for healthy family relationships - particularly as it relates to New Zealanders. So it has been both exciting and encouraging to see the rapid evolution of the Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families, with its focus on research into the dynamics of New Zealand families - particularly family formations, transitions and relationships.

Supporting families, in all their different forms, is a major part of ‘Relationship Services’ work. Last year, for instance, our counsellors assisted 23,000 clients with a range of personal and interpersonal issues. Around half of our work comprises counselling for the Family Court for relationship issues and problems around separation, custody and access. Through Child, Youth and Family (CYF), we also provide counselling and education to families experiencing violence, or who are at risk of violence, and early intervention to help resolve relationship issues and to develop communication skills.

In addition to providing stopping violence programmes for both respondents and protected persons, we are one of several non government agencies involved in the implementation of Te Rito, the government’s family violence prevention strategy.

Giving parents the skills to cope with the challenges of child-rearing is also part of our work with families. We deliver a range of parenting programmes in the community - including to 22 of the country’s prisons. We have developed a range of resources for families including videos, posters and pamphlets on topics ranging from parental separation to step-parenting.

Having worked with families and couples for more than 50 years (many people will remember us as Marriage Guidance), Relationship Services knows a lot about relationships under stress or in difficulty. It is this kind of practical “on the ground” experience that we bring to our association with the Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families and that we hope will be of value to researchers. In return, we hope to be able to draw on the Centre’s research on emerging trends and developments in the family unit to strengthen our services and resources for families.

Just as valuable however, is the opportunity for Relationship Services to be part of a nexus of academic, government, non government and community organisations working for a common cause. It is only through this kind of collaboration and co-operation, equipped with accurate and relevant information, that we can hope to achieve the best outcomes for New Zealand families.



Roy McKenzie Inaugural Annual Lecture

The inaugural annual Roy McKenzie Lecture was held on December 6, 2004 at the Law Faculty Buildings, Victoria University.

The Lecture was presented by Dr Rajen Prasad, Chief Families Commissioner. Dr Prasad's presentation, titled Family Change in New Zealand and the implications for Policy and Research covered: The patterns of family change and the competing responses to it; Elements of a comprehensive response; and The Families Commission and its work programme.

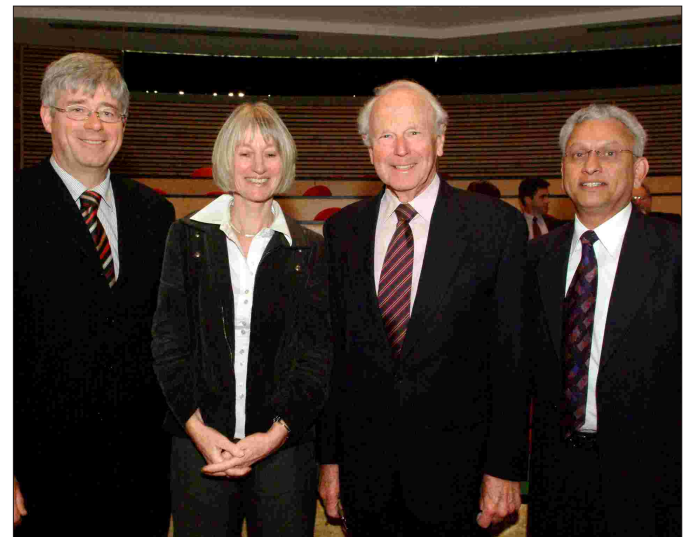
Dr Jan Pryor, Director of the Roy McKenzie Centre, opened the Lecture along with Vice Chancellor Professor Pat Walsh, and Chair of the McKenzie Centre Advisory Board, Sir Michael Hardie Boys. The Lecture was attended by over 80 people in the social science community, including government departments and independent agencies.

A copy of Dr Prasad's presentation is available on the Centre's website at www.vuw.ac.nz/mckenzie-centre.

Further information about The Families Commission can be found at: www.familiescommission.govt.nz



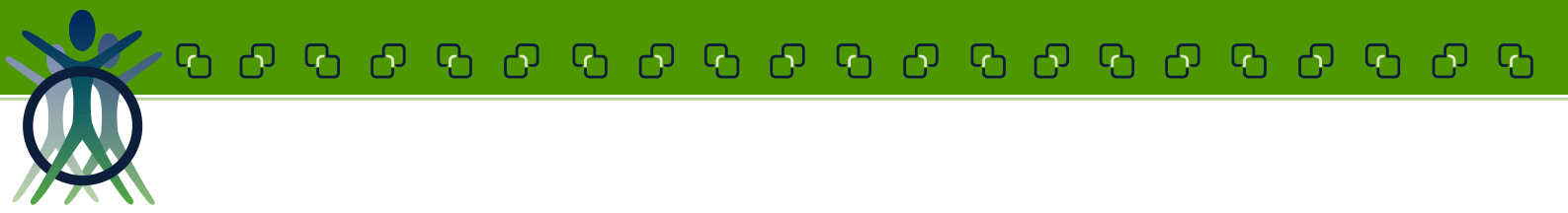
Dr Rajen Prasad, Chief Families Commissioner



Professor Pat Walsh, Dr Jan Pryor, Sir Michael Hardie Boys, and Dr Rajen Prasad

Ph.D Students

Magda Kielplikowski has been located in the Centre since late last year. Initially Magda began studying Linguistics before completing a graduate diploma in Psychology. Magda is continuing her work on looking at non-verbal conflict from the perspective of parents for her Ph.D. In late January, Rebecca Graham joined the Centre to take up our targeted Ph.D scholarship focusing on stepfamilies. A graduate of Macquarie University in Sydney, Rebecca has a strong interest in individual differences in people. Rebecca has also spent three years studying law and plans to continue with these studies at the end of her Scholarship.



Connectedness in Young New Zealanders

In 2004 this project concentrated on establishing the team, organising and holding meetings with advisory groups, and conducting focus group and key informant interviews with young participants in Wellington and Taranaki.

We have now established the project team and the advisory groups. The project has three advisory boards: Youth, Māori and Stakeholders. Youth advisors have been recruited onto the project from a range of schools and community networks in Wellington central, Porirua, Hutt Valley, Wainuiomata and Otaki. The group meets during school holiday breaks. The Māori advisory Group, Te Roopu Tiaki (TRT), consists of researchers, stakeholders and advisors from participating agencies, local iwi and, eventually pan-tribal organisations. The stakeholder group includes members from a range of government, non-governmental and community organisations interested in youth connectedness. Meetings have been ongoing with Te Roopu Tiaki, the Māori advisory group, and with the youth advisory group. The stakeholder group, comprising representatives from government departments and community groups, met at the end of the year.

Since late in 2004 the team has been busy analysing focus group and key informant data, and from this analysis, developing survey themes and questions. Laptop computers and survey software have been purchased, and the software uploaded onto the computers. We have

tried a sample of the survey with youth advisors, in order to get their feedback on its user-friendliness.

The literature review continues to be developed, and the Youth Connectedness website is expected to be up and running in March. Māori and Pacific teams are currently under-resourced so we are working to build up this area.

New Staff

Two new Research Fellows have joined the Centre. Dr Ieti Lima has recently completed a Ph.D in Sociology at the University of Auckland. Ieti has experience in health and social research with a focus on Pacific Communities in New Zealand and in the Pacific Islands. He has also worked as an independent researcher and development consultant and as a Pacific researcher/advisor on several projects. Ieti was previously with the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies at the University of Canterbury.

Dr Jeremy Robertson has also joined the Centre as a Senior Research Fellow, having previously been based in the Crime and Justice Research Centre at Victoria University. Jeremy's research includes a range of child, family and criminological topics for the Department of Justice, the Office of the Commissioner for Children, and the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the University of London. These topics have included family group conferencing, youth offending, child welfare services, legal services, Family Court counselling, and children's adjustment to family change.

contact info:

Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families
Te Pūtahi Rangahau Whānau

PO Box 600, Wellington, New Zealand

Tel +64-4-463 7430 • Fax +64-4-463 7429

Email: McKenzie-Centre@vuw.ac.nz • Website: www.vuw.ac.nz/McKenzie-Centre

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