



Greetings from Director Jan Pryor

A great deal has happened since the last newsletter. The main focus has been on setting up the 'Connectedness in Youth' project. Chris Holland has joined us as full-time project manager, and Debbie Levy is our administrator. We have made rapid progress, with Maori, Pacific, and Pakeha Youth Advisory Boards set up. They have had one all-day meeting, ably organised by Josie Roberts. Soon we will be starting to run focus groups with young people in schools. The reason for all this youthful activity is to have input from young people about the project in terms of what questions are meaningful for them, and how it is best to go about collecting information. More information featured below from Chris.

We were unsuccessful in our bid for the HRC 'Wellbeing in young New Zealanders' project; however, the grant was not awarded to anyone and another request for proposals is to be issued in the near future, so we will try again.

We have had two successful seminars in the last few weeks. One was focused on stepfamilies, and the other on Issues for the Family Court. You will find papers from both on the website.

The 'Resilience in Stepfamilies' project for the Ministry of Social Development is finally finished. It was an exciting project and the findings are as complicated as stepfamilies themselves. I will be writing up aspects of the findings over the next few months.

We have a Visiting Fellow with us for eight weeks. He is Dr. Gordon Harold, from University of Cardiff. His main area of research is the impact of parental conflict on children, and the ways in which children's perceptions of conflict affect their well-being.

The membership of the Advisory Board has changed slightly. Brenda Ratcliff has joined the Ministry of Social Development, and the CEO of Barnardos, Murray Edridge, has replaced her on our Advisory Board.

We have decided that if we are to respond adequately to the possibilities for research and other activities we need more people involved. So we are advertising two new positions. One is for a Research Fellow to focus on research for Pacific families, and the other is for a Senior Research Fellow to work with me in attracting research grants and supervising graduate students.

You will find details of these people and events in the newsletter. As always, we welcome feedback and comments.

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Advisory Board Member June McCabe

Director, Corporate Affairs, Westpac New Zealand

Tena koutou katoa

It used to be that 'family' meant mum, dad and two kids. But over the last two to three decades all that has changed. Forget the nuclear family as the ideal family structure. Today's family may now consist of children from one, two or three relationships all seated around the one dinner table. And forget mum and dad – these days that same family is just as likely to consist of two same gender parents, one solo parent or a parental guardian of no biological connection. The meaning of 'family' is now much broader, much more diverse. Often we hear this diversity labelled a demise of the family unit, but I believe it purely reflects an era of more choice as to the way we live our lives.

Why has the family unit altered? Looking back, so much societal change in the last three or four decades has affected its very make-up. Such things as the cultural blend within our society. Pair this with high divorce rates, the growth of de facto or common law unions, more solo parent families or households with mothers working full-time. All these factors have had much effect on our broader community. But has this affected how we view the importance of family in our lives? I would argue that its importance to us has not changed. What has changed is the scope of what a family can be but the strong bonds that tie us to family have not disappeared.

To fully understand that new emerging definition of what constitutes family, we must clearly identify what family means to us today. Then we can have a better understanding of how the children of today feel within the structures of the family unit and what we can expect for our future generations.

As a Maori woman, I see the concept of family having transformed into a form more similar to that of whanau, with the connections we make throughout our life being friends, family or acquaintances but all part of our wider extended family. I was born and raised in Kaitaia, a small community which, at the time, was particularly family-orientated. Raised by my grandmother, I was subsequently

adopted by her in a court of law. This legal status was an important differentiator for both of us at the time. It helped me feel like I belonged. But little did I know back then, that I belonged anyway, that I was always part of that whanau, that it extended beyond any legal framework and that I didn't have to conform to the traditional family unit to be part of a family.

The purpose of an organisation such as the Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families is to bring together great minds and fresh thinking and, through comprehensive research, consider what the landscape will look like for our future generations given the complexity that we live in today - the Centre's very conception inspired by the wonderful work of Sir Roy McKenzie who has given much energy to supporting community endeavour. It is that research that will help us understand what society and the family unit looks like now and where emerging trends will take us.

Ultimately, the Centre plays an important role in ensuring an accurate reflection of the family unit – documenting the diversity of our people and our communities – to effectively influence and support family policy development in areas such as education, welfare and childcare that better serves our communities. Given the small pool of resources available in New Zealand, it is important that we work cooperatively with other centres and bodies, such as the Families Commission, to understand the function families play in society today. Essentially, the Commission's role brings the family unit visibility once again. I am excited at the opportunity of working together to ensure a depth of research that truly reflects the diversity of the community to better influence and support that policy development. Diversity is not something to fear – rather, it means new perspectives and new thinking across all spectrums.

In a nutshell, it's all about working together, bringing our particular strengths, to benefit our communities and gaining a better understanding of who we are today and how we move forward together.

Kia Ora



Visiting Research Fellow, Dr Gordon Harold

Dr Gordon Harold joined the McKenzie Centre on 24 July to further develop collaborative links between staff in the Centre and the School of Psychology at Cardiff University in Wales. Gordon established links with Jan Pryor while working on a project looking at the role of conflict between parents and its effects on children commissioned by the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Family Charity One-Plus-One in the United Kingdom.

Gordon is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Psychology at Cardiff University. Originally from Dublin, he received his PhD from Cardiff in 1998. Gordon spent a number of years in the United States studying and working at the Institute for Social and Behavioural Research, Iowa State University. During his time at Iowa, he worked on a longitudinal study of families looking at the effects of family stress on children's development, known as the Iowa Youth and Families Project. During this time he established an interest in the role of children's understanding and perceptions of parental behaviour as an influence on their long-term psychological development.

Gordon moved to Cardiff in 1996 to further pursue his interest in this area of research. Since then he has completed a major longitudinal study looking at the effects of inter-parental conflict on children, highlighting the important role of children's perceptions of conflict as a determinant of its long-term effects on their well being. He has also developed a parent education programme aimed at informing parents about the effects of inter-parental conflict on children.

Currently he is involved in several ongoing longitudinal projects including studies looking at the interplay between genetic, intrauterine and family environmental influences on children born through assisted reproductive technologies, the early origins of childhood aggression and the disruptive behaviour disorders, the long-term impact of domestic violence on children's psychological development, and the role of the child's perspective in the context of separation and divorce. Gordon's personal motivation for pursuing research in this area is to try to convey to parents, educators and welfare professionals that the child's perspective of life within the family is a primary determinant of their emotional and behavioural development and cannot be ignored when considering the effects of family experience on their well being.

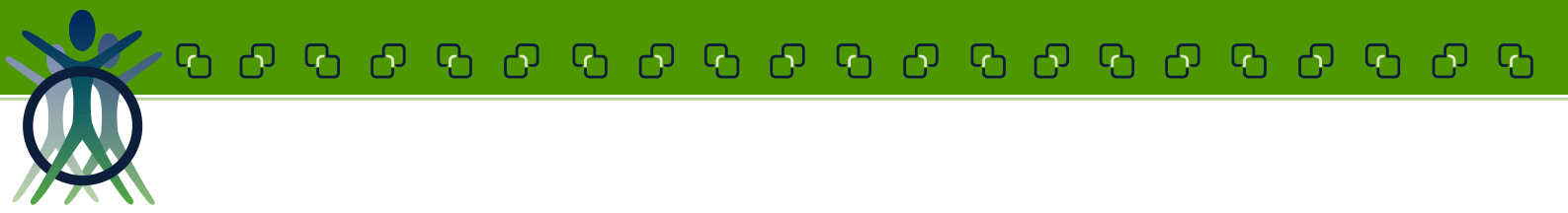
Dr Harold is an Honorary Research Fellow in the School of Psychology and a Visiting Research Fellow in the Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families. He will be with the school until 15 September.



Gordon, Sioned (Shawn-ed) and 3 year old son Keith

Resilience in Stepfamilies

The project called 'Resilience in Stepfamilies' is finished, and provides some interesting results. A major finding is that children's relationships with their non-resident parents and their stepparents are just as important for their well-being as the one they have with their resident parent. The child-stepparent relationship was found to be challenging for many families, but important for the family's functioning. It was also notable that children's assessments of the family relationships were more accurate than those of the adults in the study in predicting the outcomes for the children and the functioning of the family. Findings are being written up for dissemination and publication in the next few months.



Connectedness in Young New Zealanders

The Centre's largest research project is well underway with the establishment of the various project teams responsible for each area.

The first Youth Advisory Board was held at the University on 16 July. The role of the Board is to help us ensure that research questions and processes are appropriate for, and meaningful to youth. This in turn will optimise the likelihood that the research findings will lead towards improved outcomes for youth. Twenty-eight young people between the ages of 12 and 16 were recruited via school and community networks. Three groups, Māori, Pacific and Pakeha, worked to develop the project's central concepts and provide advice on the next stages of research. The second Youth Advisory day is planned for 1 October.

We also have ethics approval to run several focus groups in order to enhance our understanding of what connectedness and wellbeing look like for young people. The focus groups will explore issues raised by our youth advisors and research team. The first focus group will act as a pilot and take place in mid-September in Wellington. The second focus group will be conducted in Taranaki in early October.

Taking into account advice from our youth advisors, material from the focus groups, and literature reviewed to date, the next step will be to develop a questionnaire. We are currently exploring options for a youth-friendly computer-based survey to be rolled out across schools in Wellington and Taranaki in 2006. We are also getting closer to developing a dedicated website for the Youth Connectedness project.

New Staff

Three new staff have arrived at the Centre. Chris Holland, Project Manager for the Connectedness in Youth Project, has a background specialising in educational research and development with international experience as a consultant/project manager. Debbie Levy has taken up the role of administrator, and Dr Jo Kleeb as Research Fellow. Jo was awarded her PhD from Victoria University in 2003 and her interests lie in the field of life-span/developmental psychology and the impact of transitions and coping styles on subjective well-being.

Stepfamilies Seminar

A one-day seminar was held on 26 August in Wellington hosted by the Roy McKenzie Centre and School of Government. The six key note speakers included Jan Pryor, Bill Atkin (Victoria University), Jan Rodwell (Family Therapist), Claire Cartwright (Auckland University), Jeremy Robertson (Victoria University) and Dr Gordon Harold, visiting fellow from Cardiff University. It was an opportunity to present findings from four recent research projects addressing issues for stepfamilies; two from the UK, and two from New Zealand. Papers are available on our website.

Issues for the Family Court

The seminar was held on 30 August in Wellington at Te Papa hosted by the NZ Psychological Society in association with the Centre. The opening address was conducted by Principal Family Court Judge Boshier. Five key note speakers presented on topics covering report writing, parent education, issues in legal parenthood, and The Columbus Project (Australia).

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