

The Role of the Community Liaison Social Workers

Community Liaison Social Workers were first appointed in 1995 following an amendment to the Child, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989. One of the more contentious issues debated prior to the Amendment Act centered on whether or not there should be mandatory reporting of child abuse. The eventual outcome moved away from mandatory reporting in favour of the introduction of an intensive programme of public education on child abuse, supported by the development of interagency protocols for reporting child abuse cases. It was thought this approach would be more effective in improving the quality of reporting as well as building greater co-operation between agencies and community groups. The result would be a more effective child protection system.

The promotion and awareness work, is carried out by the, 'Child, Youth and Family Agency (CYF). Child Youth and Family, has at a national level, achieved extensive public awareness of child abuse through it's 'Breaking the Cycle of Child Abuse' multimedia campaigns, the development of 'An Interagency Guide to Child Abuse', 'Protocols for Child Abuse Management' and other resources such as parenting booklets, pamphlets, posters, and videos in several languages. Work also continues on the development of protocols with other agencies and groups.

At a grassroots level, much of the community public education and awareness work on how to recognize and respond to abuse is carried out by CYF Community Liaison Social Workers (CLSW's). CLSW's also help to implement established child abuse protocols as well as working with other local community service providers to develop new protocols where needed. They have a key liaison role between CYF and the community and are influential in breaking down the barriers between the Agency – as a Statutory body – and schools, pre-schools, other agencies, iwi and community groups.

If child abuse is to be reduced in NZ, a collaborative interagency approach is essential.

Much of the CLSW's time is spent visiting schools, pre-schools, community groups, iwi groups, and other agencies with frequent follow-up meetings or training sessions with more staff. The main topics are usually the definition of abuse (including neglect), signs of and reporting abuse, how CYF works and the importance of the inter-agency protocols.

The aim is to have sound and informed reporting based on good understanding of child abuse and knowledge of how to get appropriate help. The sessions provide an opportunity to answer questions on confidentiality and anonymous calls, to talk about keeping contact if there is further information to report, and how cases can be re-opened with new information. It's also a chance to explain who CYF consults with and how the 'Privacy Act' works. People learn that they should hear back at the end of a CYF investigation and they are told what to do if there are complaints. These information sessions demystify the Agency and make people more willing to work with CYF Staff. They also help clarify

which are the appropriate agencies to get help from and which statutory agencies investigate child abuse.

Other promotional work to raise awareness includes displays, showing positive parenting videos, stories in the local media, linking to national campaigns through local input and regional television interviews.

For further information or to contact your local Community Liaison Social Worker contact your nearest Child, Youth and Family office or phone the call centre on 0508 Family – 0508 326 459