The Green Paper
for Vulnerable Children

Executive
Summary of
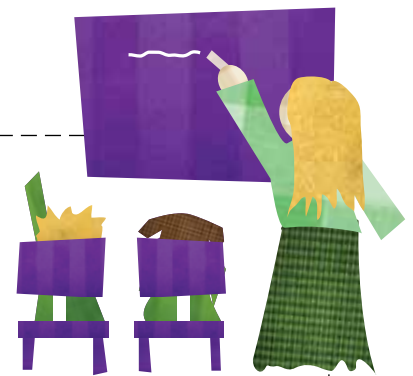Submissions

Executive Summary of Submissions

On the Green Paper for Vulnerable Children

Purpose of report

The Green Paper for Vulnerable Children invited all New Zealanders to offer their ideas, opinions and experiences to find new ways to better protect children.

This report provides an overview of the key findings from the analysis of submissions received on the Green Paper for Vulnerable Children.

Structure of report

The report first provides some background to the Green Paper for Vulnerable Children and how submissions were made. It also describes the types of submissions received and the methodology used to analyse those submissions.

The report then provides an overview of what the submissions said. It looks at what children and young people had to say about issues that affected them, and covers the key findings from the Green Paper's four main themes:

- Share responsibility
- Show leadership
- Make child-centred policy changes
- Make child-centred practice changes.

Introduction

The Government released the Green Paper for Vulnerable Children in July 2011, to promote a national discussion about how New Zealand can improve the lives of its vulnerable children.

The Green Paper asked New Zealanders to tell the Government what could or should change to help young children at risk of, or experiencing abuse and neglect, or those not reaching their full potential.

New Zealanders were actively encouraged to make submissions that would contribute to the development of the White Paper for Vulnerable Children.

To promote the Green Paper, motivate discussion and facilitate the submission process, we:

- appointed three "Champions"[1] to lead and promote public debate on the issue

- held public meetings, and met with community and business groups

- developed the www.childrensactionplan.govt.nz and www.saysomething.org.nz websites, and launched Facebook and Twitter pages

- published resources to encourage children and young people to offer their opinions

- provided information to community organisations, schools and early childhood centres, social service agencies, public libraries, churches, service clubs, mayors, businesses, large employers and media

- travelled around the country, directly engaging with people at 17 meetings held by the Minister for Social Development from Kaitaia to Invercargill, and on the street through a Green Paper Campervan Drive.

Submissions closed on 28 February 2012, although submissions received after that date were counted and included for consideration.

In all, close to 10,000 submissions were received from a diverse range of people and organisations. Submissions came in many forms and each was read and considered, whether it was a Facebook post, an email, or a full written submission. Sometimes ideas to help children were very different, but often many voices agreed on particular courses of action.

The findings of the submission analysis will inform the development of the White Paper for Vulnerable Children, which will be released later this year.

The thoughts and ideas captured in this summary make motivating, inspiring – and sometimes sobering – reading.

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1   *Three prominent New Zealanders with valuable experience in working with vulnerable children and families were appointed to encourage public debate on how New Zealand can protect its most vulnerable children. Former Barnardos chief executive Murray Edridge, former All Black Norm Hewitt, and Auckland lawyer Sandra Alofivae facilitated discussion around the country.*

Types of submissions

Where submissions included identifying information, they were categorised into the following groups:

- children and young people: submitters up to the age of 24

- general public: individual submitters who did not indicate that they worked with children or families

- community meetings: public meetings facilitated by the Minister for Social Development, the Ministry, or groups or individuals

- frontline workers: submitters who indicated they worked with children or families

- non-government organisations (NGOs): groups or organisations working in the community, including service providers and other groups working with children and families

- other organisations: includes bodies such as District Health Boards and regional councils.

Wherever in this report we have quoted from submissions to illustrate a theme, we have included the submitter's group.

Children and young people's submissions

The report begins with the voices of children and young people.

Some submissions from children and young people were facilitated by adults. Often many of their voices were merged into a single submission. Barnardos and the Office of the Children's Commissioner were instrumental in collecting these submissions. In addition, a number of young people completed an online survey specifically designed for them (these are presented as "youth" submissions).
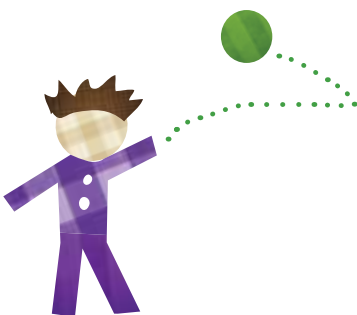
Other types of submissions

There were two main types of submissions: question and answer submissions and free-form submissions. To respect the way in which submitters chose to express their opinion, we report separately on these two channels.

Question and answer submissions: These submissions answered specific questions posed in the 43-question Green Paper consultation document, the nine priority questions on the free-post submission forms, the questions posed on the www.childrensactionplan.govt.nz or www.saysomething.org.nz websites, the single-question postcards, and online questionnaires, or the questions available through pop-ups on news media websites.

Individual members of the public and people who worked with children tended to respond this way, although some NGOs also submitted in this manner.

Free-form submissions: These submissions did not answer the formatted consultation questions, but covered Green Paper issues submitters wished to address. Submissions included letters to the Minister, emails through the "your response" inbox (an email account set up to receive email submissions), Facebook posts, tweets via Twitter and video recordings. Free-form submissions were coded according to the ideas they contained and were analysed separately from the question and answer submissions.

In general, free-form submissions came from NGOs, frontline workers, community meetings, other organisations and the general public.

The table below sets out the total numbers of submissions received through each of the available channels from each submitter type.

	Free-form	43 questions	Priority 9 questions	Postcards	Child & Youth Surveys
Children and young people	29	2	43	–	2,158
General public	1,145	792	2,678	605	–
Community meetings	45	–	–	–	–
Frontline workers	311	238	1,289	–	–
NGOs	488	71	22	–	–
Other organisations	60	6	3	–	–
Total	**2,078**	**1,109**	**4,035**	**605**	**2,158**

Methodology

How submissions were analysed

All submissions were given unique identifying numbers, and all submissions were archived. The large number of submissions received and the diversity of the responses meant we had to devise a careful recording system.

We grouped the various ideas from the submissions into common categories, and recorded the frequency with which those ideas came up. Using a sample of submissions, our team of analysts finalised a set of broad themes (or "codes") which were structured into a coding framework. Analysts used this framework to record each submission in specifically-designed databases.

Key quotes were also selected from submissions and transcribed into the databases. Some of these quotes have been included in reports on submissions. Other personal details that were provided, such as name or location, were also recorded.

Quality assurance

We commissioned an independent policy specialist to review the processes we used to code and analyse Green Paper submissions. The review found the processes were robust and fit for purpose, and expressed confidence the procedures would provide valuable and accurate data to inform the development of reports.

After a six-month consultation process, nearly 10,000 submissions were received. What New Zealanders told us is summarised below.

Children and young people's submissions

Online questionnaire

Most youth (generally aged 13–24) submitted via an online questionnaire we designed asking for their responses to specific questions. The following is a summary of their ideas.

> To grow up in a safe, happy and supported environment where you are encouraged to develop and reach for your dreams. (child/young person)

> Make sure young people are supported as well as their families. This is through ensuring they receive proper income, live in a safe and loving environment, as well as having a healthy, warm and safe living environment. (child/young person)

Thrive, belong and achieve: Submissions from young people demonstrated it was very important that they feel supported and loved, and have opportunities to do their best in all areas of their lives, including education. Submissions said parents and whānau should be responsible for ensuring children and young people thrive, belong and achieve. However, some submissions recognised the role that society and young people have in making sure this happens.

Parents, family, and society: Submissions from young people said parents and family were seen to be responsible for providing support, security, love and the necessities of life. Some submissions said the role of parents and family is to teach morals. They said they want the wider community and government to step in when there are opportunities to provide support, particularly around helping parents raise their children.

Monitoring of children and young people: Almost all submissions from young people supported monitoring children and young people. Some submissions noted specific conditions for any monitoring. Submissions suggested that families, schools, trusted others and government could have responsibility for monitoring children and young people. When asked who should be monitored, many submissions said children or young people at-risk. However, some submissions said all children and young people should be monitored throughout their childhoods.

Information-sharing: Many young submitters said it was "okay" for people who are working with the child to share personal information, but specified they should first ask for the child or young person's permission. Submissions commonly argued it is acceptable to share information if it is needed to protect a child from harm, so long as that information is correct and the child's privacy is protected as much as possible. Those they believed should share information included education and social service professionals, government agencies and, in some cases, parents and children.

Prioritisation: When asked if some children and young people should get priority over others, many submissions from young people agreed. They specified that vulnerable populations – such as children and young people at risk of abuse and neglect – should get priority.

What makes a difference: Personal connections make a difference for youth – in particular, if they have someone who believes in them, loves them, and who they can talk to. Submissions also said education, activities and having a good environment make a difference for them.

How lives could be improved: Providing support to both young people and their families was identified as a way to improve young people's lives. Submissions also said schools had a part to play, and that providing opportunities for children and young people is important. Some submissions said consultation with young people is another way to improve lives.

Facilitated submissions

Children and young people also made submissions through facilitated discussions carried out by schools and other organisations.

> *For us to feel valued we need our parents and families to feel interested in what we do, to talk about our feelings and how they are feeling. (child/young person)*

> *To keep me safe, no violence in my community, no patched members, no alcohol or drugs, be a family, no fighting. (child/young person)*

The role of parents and families/whānau: Children and young people said they want their parents and whānau to be supportive, to keep them safe and secure, to meet their emotional needs, to love them and provide a sense of belonging. They also want parents and family to be involved in their activities, to see them as unique individuals and as a priority. Children and young people said they want their parents and family to meet their physical needs and to be good role models.

The role of communities: Children and young people said they want safe communities. In their communities they want services for children and community support for struggling families. They want the adults in their communities to provide them with opportunities, activities and venues.

The role of schools: From schools, children and young people said they want safe and secure environments, good teachers, to get an education and learn life skills. They want to be treated fairly, to be treated as individuals, listened to with respect and to be consulted.

The role of the professional workforce: Children and young people said they want good communication from adults who help them and for those workers to be professional and know what they are talking about. They want workers to check up on children and follow through with their promises.

The role of government: Children and young people want government to provide equal opportunities and access to services, and for government to ensure that schools are supported. They want government to help keep families together by providing services and increasing household incomes. Children and young people also want government to address inequality and to provide safe and secure environments. They saw a role for government to provide opportunities for them to have fun locally, build capacity within local organisations, and to ensure agencies and organisations are connected. Children and young people also want to have a say in developing laws and policies.
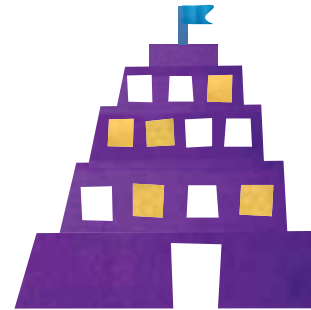
General submissions

These summaries include both question and answer and free-form submissions.

Share responsibility

Sharing responsibility is the first of four key themes structuring the Green Paper. The questions in this section were about the responsibilities of two particular groups:

- parents and caregivers
- communities.

Parents and caregivers

> *You can't make the child ok if the family is not ok. (other organisation)*

> *If we want to deal effectively with the problem of child abuse we need to act on the general socioeconomic causes of stress and help the many parents who have themselves been damaged by abuse, who are a significant proportion of the population. (NGO)*

Submissions broadly agreed on the types of services and supports that need to be available to families and vulnerable children.

Support for parents and caregivers: Submissions strongly endorsed parenting programmes and identified the need for better maternity services and support early in a child's life. Submissions identified a need for more specialised services, including treatment for addictions, family violence and mental health. Arguments for universal services and targeted services were both present in the submissions. Some submissions drew attention to the needs of particular groups of carers; for example, grandparents, foster parents, teen parents and carers of children with disabilities.

Improvements to Child, Youth and Family: Submissions called for improvements to Child, Youth and Family practices. Suggestions included better monitoring and screening of families, and upskilling and requiring formal qualifications from people who work with children. Submissions also argued for Child, Youth and Family to provide the resources necessary for appropriate decisions to be made on behalf of children and their families (for example, by reducing caseloads and providing more support from experts).

Balance not right: Submissions argued that government did not have the balance right between supporting families and protecting children. Submissions were most likely to argue that the needs of children should come before the needs of parents and caregivers, particularly when children were at risk. Other arguments included supporting families so children did not become vulnerable, that negative statistics prove the balance is wrong, and that better support is needed for Child, Youth and Family to make good decisions about child wellbeing.

When to step in: Submissions argued that government should step in "as early as possible", particularly where risk was identified.

Address the wider causes of vulnerability: Submissions emphasised the need to address the wider social and economic causes of vulnerability. Submissions recognised the disproportionate burden of poverty and inequality experienced by Māori, Pasifika, and immigrant families.

Communities

Submissions endorsed the view that government should support communities and community groups – including parents' groups – to enhance the wellbeing of their children.

> *The Government can support community groups such as mothers' groups, play groups, Playcentre and schools to offer the best service possible. If these are strong, community spirit should grow and hopefully this will provide a feeling of responsibility for the children that live in that community. (general public)*

Communities of place, culture, need, and faith:
The strongest call was for government to build and support communities in their development. Submissions recognised diverse types of communities, including communities of place, culture, need and faith. Submissions argued that programmes and initiatives supported by government needed to work with the circumstances of people's lives, be adequately resourced, and be located in places where people naturally gather.

Strengthen communities: Submissions argued that responsibility for vulnerable children needed to be shared more with the community, and that the community needed to have greater involvement in the lives of families. A commonly mentioned phrase was "it takes a village to raise a child". Submissions suggested more support from local and central government.

Working with community leaders: Submissions argued for working with community leaders and encouraging information-sharing and collaboration between government and community agencies.

Strengthen families: Submissions advocated policies that would help strengthen families and encourage nurturing of children. Ideas included more support and training for parents, and that government policy should better recognise the role of parents and caregivers.

More programmes and services: Submissions argued that government should introduce or expand specific programmes and services. Arguments were made for an expansion of support to parents through education and training programmes, various services that support parents and intervene early in a child's life (including early childhood education) and informal forms of support such as mentoring programmes.

Increase community action on child maltreatment: Submissions also expressed support for social marketing campaigns, greater consequences for those who neglect and/or abuse children and for those who do not report abuse they know is happening, and for introducing mandatory reporting[2] by either professionals or the public.

Reducing barriers to community responsibility: Submissions argued for removing barriers to allow communities to support vulnerable children better. Submissions suggested making reporting abuse easier, improving co-ordination between services, removing red tape (for example, amending privacy laws), improving the effectiveness of services to families and lowering the threshold for access to services.

Personal responsibility for community action: Submissions commonly responded to this question by offering specific examples of when they had taken personal responsibility to help others in the past, or initiatives they would like to take up in the future.

Show leadership

The second key theme in the Green Paper was to show leadership, in particular as it relates to:

- a Vulnerable Children's Action Plan
- legislation changes
- working with whānau, hapū, iwi and Māori leaders.

Vulnerable Children's Action Plan

The priorities for children of all ages should be that they are safe, protected from potential harm and live in a warm, caring and loving environment in which they are valued for themselves and experience the opportunities to achieve their aspirations, as is their right under law. (general public)

Support for an action plan: Almost all submissions responding to this question were in support of an action plan although opinion differed on who should be targeted: all children or children with specific needs.

Definition: Submissions said a necessary first step in developing a plan was to define what a "vulnerable child" is. Some submissions said all children are vulnerable and any definition should reflect this. Others recognised the needs of particular groups of children, such as children with disabilities, children living in hardship, children who had been maltreated or who were in danger of being maltreated, very young children or Māori children.

Features of an action plan: Some submissions suggested that an action plan could allow government to set goals and targets. It also should be workable, action-focused and raise awareness about abuse. Submissions said that an action plan should be cross-sector and cross-party, owned by communities, and demonstrate commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi.

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2   *Mandatory reporting is a legal requirement to report suspected child abuse or neglect. It can apply to designated professions such as teachers, physicians, health professionals and social workers. Some countries extend mandatory reporting to all persons to report suspected abuse or neglect, regardless of profession. There may be penalties for non-compliance with the obligation.*

Goals and actions the Government could include in a plan: Submissions presented a range of suggestions about what could be included in an action plan. These included:

- reducing or eliminating child maltreatment and deaths
- improving health and wellbeing
- improving education
- providing free universal services
- improving parenting education
- improving access to, and take up of, services.

Priorities for vulnerable children: The priorities for vulnerable children across all age groups (early years, primary school age and adolescence) centred on health, safety and education/training. Some suggested the main priority was to reduce child poverty.

Legislation changes

> *Put children at the centre of every policy consideration. (frontline worker)*

Compliance: A number of submissions saw value in using legislation to underpin a Vulnerable Children's Action Plan. Submissions suggested the main purpose of legislation would be to ensure compliance.

Reporting: Submissions favoured legislation requiring government social sector agencies to report on progress made against an action plan. Some submissions supported requiring NGOs, government or an independent body to report on progress. Many submissions suggested the Commissioner for Children be responsible for reporting. Submissions suggested that legislation could require reporting on outcomes for children, outcomes of services, family circumstances or expenditure on children's services.

Child-centred: Submissions proposed a range of actions or principles that could be included in legislation to improve outcomes for vulnerable children. The most common suggestion was to make legislation more child-centred through a child impact assessment.

Minister/Ministry for Children: Submissions suggested having a Minister or Ministry for Children.

Other ideas: These included greater support for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) in New Zealand law, implementing requirements or sanctions for beneficiaries, and harsher consequences for maltreatment.

Working with whānau, hapū, iwi and Māori leaders

> *Listen, work alongside, bring the policy makers to the frontline to actually see what it's really like, trust Māori have positive solutions to help their own people – tino rangatiratanga. Improve what does work and dissolve what doesn't. (general public)*

Across submissions, the issue of how government should work with Māori was less frequently addressed relative to other issues. Diversity in responses on how government should work with Māori reflected different beliefs about whether Māori should be treated differently from Pākehā, or whether they should be treated the same as Pākehā.

Partnerships: Submissions suggested different strategies of partnership, from consulting with Māori to letting Māori get on with it without government interference. The most strongly supported themes were allocating resources to culturally relevant services, consulting and working in partnership to deliver services, using the Treaty of Waitangi principles and committing to equal outcomes for Māori. Submissions also suggested strengthening Māori communities and supporting iwi, while some suggested Māori-led organisations needed to be closely monitored.

Culturally-tailored services: Submissions recognised the need for funding and support of culturally specific services, or mainstream services that could meet the needs of all their clients. Whānau Ora was strongly supported as a model for working with Māori, both in its focus on supporting the whānau system and its integration of services. Suggestions for improving services for Māori included upskilling the workforce working with Māori children (including improving cultural competency), improving Child, Youth and Family practices, using a whole-of-whānau approach and putting children first.

Connecting to services: Strategies for connecting "hard-to-reach" Māori to services were broadly relationship-based (using trusted sources, outreach services, a lead provider, and being persistent) or service-based (making services more culturally appropriate and easier to access). Other strategies included using social marketing as a way of drawing Māori into services, and engaging with whānau when the opportunity arises.

Highlighting similarity: Some submissions argued that all children are the same and culture/ethnicity is not important, and some submitters rejected the idea of services specifically for Māori.

Reducing barriers to services: Universal child rights that could be commonly understood still left room for the idea that to meet the needs of vulnerable Māori children, different pathways were necessary for these children (a belief that culture is a universal human right).

Social and economic factors: Framing vulnerability as the result of poverty and other social and economic factors, rather than as an issue of ethnicity, led to arguments for addressing the wider social and economic causes of vulnerability.

Make child-centred policy changes

The third key theme in the Green Paper was to make child-centred policy changes. This included:

- reviewing government spending to get better results for vulnerable children

- adopting a vulnerable child-first allocation policy

- watching out for vulnerable children.
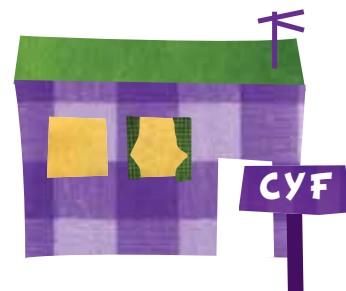
Reviewing government spending to get better results for vulnerable children

Failure to support families and prevent maltreatment of children is extremely costly long term. By reprioritising spending towards prevention the Government will save large amounts of money in the future. (NGO)

Targeting vulnerable children: Submissions showed strong support for targeting tailored services to vulnerable children, including Māori and Pasifika children. Some submissions argued against targeting funding to vulnerable children. Most argued all children need to have their basic needs met by universal services, but vulnerable children should receive additional services to meet their specific needs. Some submissions said all services should be universal.

Early intervention: Submissions supported a stronger focus on early intervention. Submissions argued that the early years were critical in a child's development, and that prevention was better and cheaper than a cure. Some submissions qualified this position by arguing that this should not result in reducing support for older children.

Reallocating funding: Submissions argued that money spent on children was money saved later. These submissions argued that money directed to vulnerable children would be recouped from reduced demand for "bottom of the cliff" expenditure. Submissions suggested funds could be found by creating efficiencies in current government spending. Another common suggestion was to direct funds away from expenses that did not directly benefit children, such as sporting events. Submissions also argued for increasing tax on goods such as alcohol and cigarettes, and increasing the tax paid by higher income earners and businesses.

Evidence-based policy: Submissions showed overall support for funding programmes and services with a sound evidential base. Some suggested there was a need to evaluate existing programmes, that evidence was available from overseas, and that there should be more investment in research. Some submissions expressed concerns that a focus on evidence could stifle innovation, waste time when urgent action is needed, or that definitions of evidence are too narrow.

Adopting a vulnerable child-first allocation policy

It must become a national priority that vulnerable families are given whatever help, support and other interventions that they might need to enable them to function better and parent safely. (frontline worker)

Prioritising carers, family and whānau of vulnerable children: Submissions were generally in support of targeting services to the carers of vulnerable children. Supporters argued that those caring for vulnerable children need to be looked after in order for children to have the best possible outcomes. Many submissions argued that non-parental carers of vulnerable children, such as grandparents and foster parents, needed more support. Some said carers should always be prioritised, while some did not support prioritisation of carers of vulnerable children.

What services and when: Most submissions argued that support and prioritisation should be offered on a case-by-case basis when it was observed that carers were unable to meet children's basic needs. The most commonly suggested services to target to carers of vulnerable children

were health services, addiction services, financial assistance and social housing. Another common suggestion was to provide carers of vulnerable children with improved access to early childhood education services.

Watching out for vulnerable children

We recommend every unborn child is automatically screened against a standardised set of risk versus strengths assessment tool, conducted by the lead maternity provider and fed into a national database. From there it would be important to properly assess all those infants and their parents who met the threshold for requiring additional monitoring and support.... If this screening tool separated out the level of need required for each family, and the services selected matched this need, it would likely result in a more efficient use of limited resources. (NGO)

Monitoring vulnerable children: Almost all submissions supported monitoring vulnerable children in some way. There were diverse views on how much monitoring should take place. Common ideas included having as much monitoring as possible and monitoring at a minimum level to ensure child safety, with a small number of submissions opposing any form of monitoring. Arguments for monitoring to be limited to vulnerable children were present, as well as arguments for universal monitoring. Some submissions argued that monitoring should be conducted in a positive way with an emphasis on providing support to families. Some suggested this could be achieved if monitoring were conducted by those already involved with children (for example, Plunket or Child, Youth and Family). Some submissions also discussed ways of minimising the negative consequences associated with monitoring, including the need for well-trained professionals, transparent processes and balance between monitoring and privacy rights.

Use of monitoring information: Many submissions suggested streamlined information-sharing between professionals as an effective way of tracking vulnerable children. A centralised database was the most common suggestion for achieving this goal. The need for confidentiality of information was raised as a concern.

Mandatory reporting: A small number of submissions addressed the issue of mandatory reporting, with support for mandatory reporting slightly higher than opposition. Submissions supporting mandatory reporting suggested it should be implemented with care, and that mandatory reporting would only be beneficial if agencies were adequately resourced to follow up all reports. Some submissions discussed who should be bound by mandatory reporting. Most suggested it be limited to trained professionals, while some supported mandatory reporting for everyone. Submissions opposed to mandatory reporting argued it is unfeasible, may deter help seeking and does not reduce child maltreatment. Some submissions suggested a more constructive approach would be to have highly trained, well-resourced professionals, who were able to use their own judgement to report when necessary.

How much information should be shared: The balance of opinion was for information to be shared in order to keep children safe. Most submissions that addressed this issue were in support of sharing the minimum of information to keep children safe. Support for sharing all information was low in comparison, as was total opposition to information-sharing.

Many submissions discussed the need for protocols to guide information-sharing to preserve family privacy where possible.

Who should share information: Most submissions that addressed this issue were in support of information-sharing between government agencies and NGOs working with families. Submissions were in support of qualified professionals sharing information with the aid of training and professional codes of ethics. A smaller number of submissions argued that information should be shared among both the relevant professionals and the families involved in child welfare cases. Some submissions suggested a centralised database could be used to aid effective information-sharing.

When information should be shared: Submissions were in support of sharing information only when there were concerns about a particular child. A smaller but substantial group of submissions argued information should be shared as a usual part of social service provision.

Make child-centred practice changes

The fourth key theme in the Green Paper was to make child-centred practice changes. This included:

- improving the workforce for children
- better connecting of vulnerable children to services
- improving service delivery.

Improving the workforce for children

Appropriate training and retraining. Training courses should be regularly evaluated. Professionals in all the disciplines necessary to support vulnerable children and their families need to be involved in the workforce for children and should be trained together. (NGO)

Collaboration: Submissions supported joined-up services and networking, having a centralised database, removing funding and contractual barriers, having case co-ordination by a lead agency or professional, improving cross-sector and interagency co-operation, and using service hubs or centres.

Qualifications: The most commonly suggested ideas about competencies and skills were that the workforce should have formal qualifications and should receive training in child protection. Personal qualities were also said to be important. Submissions identified a broad set of skills and knowledge needed by those who work with children.

Professional: Submissions most frequently identified health and education workers, social workers and "all who affect a child's wellbeing" as people who should be included in the workforce for children.

Support: Suggestions to support the workforce were about improving pay and working conditions, professional development, supervision, being valued and supported by their employers and reasonable workloads. As well as professionals in services, foster carers were identified as benefiting from professional development.

Better connecting vulnerable children to services

Establishing key relationships that then identify and connect into all the services they need, rather than expecting them to have multiple relationships and there being no clear accountability for ensuring the full range of the families' and children's needs are met. (general public)

Reducing barriers: Submissions supported reducing barriers, such as cost, hours of operation, and transport. There were suggestions about using universal services as the entry point, outreach services, home visiting, service hubs, and the need for services to be flexible. Submissions suggested that workers needed to persevere and maintain engagement with families.

Advocate or lead provider: There was support for using an advocate or lead provider as a single point of contact for the family, to connect them to services and oversee their progress. Greater networking between professionals was also suggested.

Raising awareness: Submissions talked about better advertising of services, phone hotlines, earlier identification of problems and educating children on how to get help.

Improving service delivery

We want to see more one-stop shops and government services in close proximity to each other to provide easier access to the community and more communication and collaboration between the services. (NGO)

Service hubs: Submissions suggested co-location of services, including using schools, early childhood centres and other community facilities as hubs.

Schools: There was moderate support overall for social workers in schools, and some support for schools and childcare centres providing information about other services.

Improve Child, Youth and Family: Comments about Child, Youth and Family changes frequently referred to difficulties in getting a response to a referral, what people saw as a variable quality of social workers, and a perception that social workers are overloaded.

Better use of universal services: Submissions also suggested using universal services (such as Well Child) as the entry point to other services.

Better links: There was a clear call for government agencies and NGOs, and health services and schools, to be better connected. Submissions also suggested making improvements in contracting and funding arrangements, networking between professionals, and case co-ordination by a lead agency or professional. Some submissions suggested creating service directories for communities to refer to.

Child-centred approach to service delivery: Submissions suggested there are different possible approaches to service delivery. The service approach most frequently suggested was a child-centred approach. This meant both a holistic approach (rather than focusing on just one need or problem) and a child-first approach (rather than a family/whānau-first approach).