

Volume I

The White Paper
for Vulnerable
Children



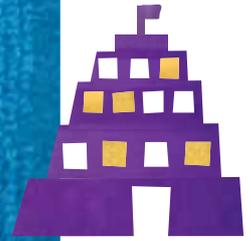
THE WHITE PAPER FOR
VULNERABLE CHILDREN



*Take care of our children
Take care of what they hear
Take care of what they see
Take care of what they feel
For how the children grow
So will be the shape of Aotearoa*

– Dame Whina Cooper

Statement from the Minister



This White Paper on Vulnerable Children contains the most important work I can do as a Minister and that we can do as a country – protect our children.

As a Minister I have a deep sense of responsibility for the thousands of children who are hurt, neglected, abused, and killed in this country. New Zealanders are sick of seeing the tragic consequences of this, and now is our chance to break that destructive cycle.

In this paper you will find measures to protect children that will fundamentally change what we do now. It is with the backing of the country and the will of this Government that we can make those changes. We must have the courage of our convictions and take these bold steps. What we're doing now clearly isn't working well enough.

We are deliberately targeting resources, interventions, and support to those children who need it most. Internationally, experts agree that targeted investment is crucial to greater social cohesion and to the enhanced development of the most vulnerable. This doesn't mean we sacrifice universal services, but that we make an extra effort to wrap every support we can around those children who are in danger of neglect and abuse.

We know there are families suffering financial hardship, and that is particularly concerning when it is persistent. This Government is committed to alleviating this, and is doing so with extra financial assistance, through supporting community organisations that help families manage better, and by maintaining a focus on getting people off welfare and into work.

I welcome the Children's Commissioner's Expert Advisory Group report on child poverty and have incorporated much of the drive of their proposals into these changes.

Though I acknowledge the pressure that financial hardship puts on families, that is never an excuse to neglect, beat, or abuse children. Most people in such circumstances do not abuse their children, and I cannot tolerate it being used as justification for those who do.

There is also no excuse for doing nothing when you know a child is in danger from neglect or abuse. Parents, whānau, friends, and neighbours all have a responsibility to make sure children are protected from harm and to speak up and seek help. This is the power to protect.

The plans in this White Paper are challenging and some will be difficult to achieve and may take time. These are significant changes that affect every New Zealander, from the streets of every community to the top of the Beehive. We all need to embrace the work before us that will better protect children.

Whether you agree or disagree with the measures outlined here, the fact that you're reading this means you care. So take the next step and be part of the action to protect children.

We can and will do better. We owe it to the children of New Zealand.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paula Bennett'.

Hon Paula Bennett
Minister for Social Development



Introduction to Volume I

The White Paper for Vulnerable Children sets out what will be done to protect vulnerable children who are at risk of maltreatment.¹

Most children grow up happy, healthy, and loved by their families, whānau, and caregivers. But too many don't have adults who keep them safe and put their needs first. There are many reasons for this, but parental capacity, poverty, welfare dependency, drug and alcohol abuse, and mental health issues are frequently blamed.

Despite a strong focus by the Government on child abuse and neglect, and the best efforts of workers on the frontline, there will not be a significant change in the number of children being abused and neglected until adults keep children safe, or when they don't, communities, services and agencies can better identify, assess, and respond.

We must work together to find those children who are vulnerable to abuse and neglect, and keep them safe.

This isn't just about breakfast in the morning or poverty, as important as those things are. It is about finding the children we are really concerned about before they are hurt, then acting to ensure they have a brighter future.

To make this happen, we must make better use of the information we have, and stop children slipping between the cracks.

It is the responsibility of parents and caregivers to raise and protect their children. It is the responsibility of families, whānau, iwi, and communities to support parents and caregivers. But when basic needs are not being met, support fails, and children become unsafe, the Government has to step in.

This White Paper details exactly how Government will lead the change to achieve that.



¹ There are four parts to the White Paper for Vulnerable Children:

Volume I contains the Government's plans for getting better outcomes for our most at-risk children.

Children's Action Plan – setting out actions and timeframes.

Volume II contains the evidence and the detailed rationale for the plans.

Summary of Submissions – covering the nearly 10,000 received on the Green Paper for Vulnerable Children.

Shining a light on abuse, neglect, and harm

The Government will focus on vulnerable children in a way that has never been done before.

The White Paper for Vulnerable Children sets out a programme of change that will shine a light on abuse, neglect, and harm by identifying our most vulnerable children and targeting services to them to ensure they get the protection and support they need.

These changes are the result of months of research and discussion, and have drawn on the public's response to the Green Paper for Vulnerable Children, domestic and international research, and other evidence, including investigations into the killing of Chris and Cru Kahui, and the subsequent coroner's report.

The Government will pass legislation, and enact policies and practices so that:

- parents, caregivers, family, whānau, and communities understand and fulfil their responsibilities towards children
- professionals identify vulnerable children and act earlier
- communities identify and meet the needs of vulnerable children as early as possible
- government education, health, care and protection and justice agencies, and professionals, community organisations and workers share information appropriately to protect vulnerable children
- the lives of vulnerable children in state care is made a priority across government departments and agencies
- people and organisations working with children identify and respond to the needs of vulnerable children
- tough new measures are in place to protect children from adult abusers who are likely to continue to hurt children.

These changes will transform the way each and every one of us – from the Beehive to your community, from parents, family, whānau, caregivers, communities, to agencies and government departments – works together for the earlier identification, support, and protection of vulnerable children.

There are opportunities for every New Zealander to become involved in making this plan a reality.

Our children depend on it.

The sad reality

New Zealand is a great place to grow up. When measured against the rest of the world, our children excel on almost every level.

The vast majority of children enjoy loving and supportive homes and families. This is because the vast majority of New Zealand parents are absolutely dedicated to their children.

Most parents put their children first, second and third in their order of priorities. They invest all they have in their health, education, and wellbeing, and in their hopes and dreams. They nurture, support and encourage, in good times and through bad. And when they struggle, they will go without to ensure their children have a better start and more opportunities than they did. Most of all, they want their children to be happy and fulfilled.

It is the job of communities and government to support families in what they do best, by providing quality co-ordinated universal and specialist services and resources, supportive policy, programmes and law, but otherwise meddle as little as possible.

But that isn't the reality for every child.

Too many children live a life far below the norm, most of them let down by the very people, often the only people, who they should be able to trust and rely on to love and protect them.

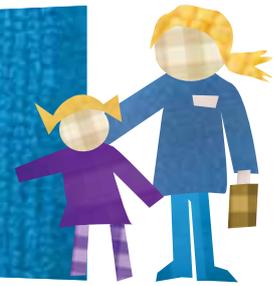
Here is the sad reality:

- Between seven and 10 children, on average, are killed each year by someone who is supposed to be caring for them. And in 2010, 209 children under 15 required hospital treatment for assault related injuries.
- In the 12 months to 30 June 2012, 152,800 care and protection notifications were made to Child, Youth and Family.
- After investigation, Child, Youth and Family found:
 - 4,766 cases of neglect
 - 3,249 cases of physical abuse
 - 1,396 cases of sexual abuse
 - 12,114 cases of what social workers term 'emotional abuse', often children who have witnessed family violence.
- As at 30 June 2012, there were 3,884 New Zealand children in out-of-home state care.²

But, recent advances in research and technology mean we can now start to get ahead of the problem, identifying and helping some 20,000 – 30,000 vulnerable children and families, in many cases **before** the greatest harm occurs.

² Children in the custody of the Chief Executive of MSD in out-of-home care and protection placements.

Tackling the problem



Children are hurting now and we cannot wait to act

This White Paper focuses on vulnerable children who have been abused or maltreated, and those at the greatest risk of maltreatment, along with the adults who are endangering them.

Vulnerability can mean different things to different people. Our definition is:

Vulnerable children are children who are at significant risk of harm to their wellbeing now and into the future as a consequence of the environment in which they are being raised and, in some cases, due to their own complex needs. Environmental factors that influence child vulnerability include not having their basic emotional, physical, social, developmental and/or cultural needs met at home or in their wider community.

These are the children who, despite the huge public investment in health, education and welfare, remain at the greatest risk.

Children at the centre of all we do

We are proudly putting children at the centre of the picture – wrapping services and supports around them and their needs.

Many New Zealanders will recognise this as the traditional Māori view of children – which it is.

Māori consider children as taonga, to be treasured, protected, supported and nurtured, not just by parents but by extended family, community and society.

We want to make that Māori view of children a reality today. Not just something we say, and not just for Māori.

This is because, while Māori children are more likely than others to come to the attention of care and protection services, this is a problem that crosses ethnicity and communities.

Likewise the solution won't rest on a single factor or change and won't be fixed by one community or group working alone.

Treating children as taonga is about what parents, whānau, communities and government actually do, how we all act, day in and day out.

These proposals are a big step towards achieving that change.

Reporting child abuse

The issue of mandatory reporting of child abuse has been debated for many years. There are pros and cons. In some places where it has been introduced there has been an increase in the number of children who slip through the cracks because child protection agencies are so swamped with notifications that they can't cope. There are also concerns about child protection getting needlessly involved in the lives of everyday families.

New Zealand already has high levels of notification – the same or higher than some Australian states which have mandatory reporting. In fact, the vast majority of New Zealand children who are seriously abused are already known to government agencies.

Because of this the Government will not be legislating for mandatory reporting.

What we will do is introduce a range of initiatives that will raise expectations on agencies and make it easier for frontline staff and the public to identify vulnerable children and report concerns.

Introduce compulsory child abuse policies for agencies working with children

- Change the law so all agencies working with children must have policies covering how to recognise and report suspected child abuse and neglect. This will be supported by a code of practice that makes it clear that everyone working with children has a responsibility to report suspected abuse or neglect.
- Train all frontline public sector staff (for example, doctors and teachers) by 2015 to help them recognise the signs of child abuse and act to protect children.

Make it simple for the public to raise concerns

- Consolidate contact centres into one free “*Child Protect*” telephone line to take calls from anyone who has concerns about a child. Trained staff will listen to concerns and direct calls to the appropriate place to get help. The public will also be able to report concerns by email, text or online.
- Information about at-risk children or families will be logged in a new information system and, if further action is needed, information will be accessed by relevant professionals so they can see the whole picture for a child.
- If a vulnerable child is referred to a community provider, a child and family worker, or government agency, all relevant information on the child will be available to them so they have the facts at their fingertips. For example, a social worker receiving two separate referrals about a child will be able to see that the child has had a recent hospital admission for an injury and decide to increase their level of response.

Helping people to spot signs of abuse

- Launch a public awareness campaign to explain the sorts of things that family, neighbours, and people in the community should look out for and where they can go for help. This will reinforce the “Child Protect” line as the place to call, and give practical tips and warning signs.

- By the end of 2014, a public awareness initiative will begin. It will raise awareness of what the public should be concerned about and how to seek help.
- By the end of 2014, a single free Child Protect telephone line will be introduced for the public to raise concerns about children.
- By the end of 2015, all frontline public sector staff will have training to help them recognise the signs of child abuse.



Finding, checking and connecting

We need to find, assess, and connect the most vulnerable children to services earlier and better.

To do this, it is essential that the agencies and professionals on the frontline have the right tools.

In nearly all of the most tragic child abuse cases, there were many people who were involved with the child and who knew something wasn't right. Often, it is found that a range of people, including doctors, social workers, police, family members, and neighbours, held pieces of information which, if put together, would have shown how unsafe the child was.

Too often, children who are clearly at risk of being abused are not identified because agencies don't know where they are, or who they are living with. Sometimes agencies who need to, don't even know that they have been born.

This must not continue. We must not allow such vital information to slip through our fingers. The Government will give those on the frontline the tools to find and protect children who need help – earlier and faster.

A new way to help professionals identify children at risk

- The Government will build a Vulnerable Kids Information System to draw together information on the most vulnerable children from government agencies and frontline professionals.
- This system will form a comprehensive picture of these vulnerable children and serve as an early alert.
- Government agencies and frontline professionals will be able to access the information specific to the children they are working with, when they need it. Community-based agencies contracted to deliver services to vulnerable children and their families will also have appropriate access.
- This system will enable those on the frontline to evaluate their concerns in the context of other information. For example, concerns of a school principal about a child who is regularly absent may be considered against an increase in medical visits or concerns by neighbours to the free telephone number. This additional information could result in a community provider checking on the family and linking them to services.
- Frontline professionals and community-based agencies will be able to enter information about vulnerable children, such as exposure to family violence, change of address, or engagement with a service provider. This puts everyone involved with the child on the same page and prevents children being 'lost' to services through such basic things as moving house.

- High-risk adults (those who have previously abused or neglected children) will also be tracked and monitored. For example, an automatic red flag will be raised if the system shows that a sole parent on a benefit has moved into a house with someone who has previously abused a child.

Security an absolute priority

- The security of the Vulnerable Kids Information System will be paramount.
- Only those who need to see the information will be able to do so.
- We will monitor who is accessing information.
- A code of conduct on safe information-sharing will be developed, and there will be penalties for misuse.

Though it is vital that information about vulnerable children is better shared among professionals on the frontline, it is crucial that the right checks and balances are in place. This system will have different levels of access for different professionals and groups.

It will be secure, and all data will be password protected with clear protocols for use. Only those who need to see the information will be able to do so, with different professionals and organisations having different levels of access, depending on their role. For example, a social worker, a school principal, and a paediatrician would be able to see different levels of information about a particular child or family.

The log-in will enable authorities to ensure the information is being used appropriately, and to investigate any complaints of privacy breaches.

A code of conduct will be developed on safe information-sharing to help professionals working with children understand when and how they can safely share information. All government agency staff will be required to sign the code of conduct, and agencies which are funded by government to deliver services will also be expected to make it part of their staff training.

Getting ahead of the problem

- The Government will build new tools to help professionals identify which children are most at risk. A risk predictor tool has been tested by the Ministry of Social Development in conjunction with the University of Auckland and will be further developed to include a wider range of data.

Using available information held by government, it has been possible to develop statistical criteria that help identify children at greater risk, based on information about them and their family circumstances. This approach could be used to guide professionals towards those children who are most vulnerable.

Such an approach informs rather than replaces professional judgment.

This system takes information buried in large databases and makes it accessible to professionals deciding what services a child or family needs. It can help agencies connect the right children with the right services and professionals early on, before issues escalate and serious harm is done.

This means that for the first time resources can be aimed at children at greater risk, in many cases **before** they are abused or neglected.

Although it's early days, the system is already showing its predictive potential, allowing between 20,000 and 30,000 vulnerable children and families to be identified so that professionals such as doctors and social workers can take a closer look.

No system is perfect and, as is the case now, some children may be missed or incorrectly identified as at risk. Early indications, however, are that this system can significantly **reduce** the level of false negatives and false positives compared to the current system.

The reality is that the majority of notifications to Child, Youth and Family don't result in a finding of child abuse or neglect. Better and smarter use of the information government already holds can help us focus on children who are really vulnerable, reducing the chances that a child in need will be missed, or that an everyday family will be incorrectly labelled as being at risk. Beyond this, better use of information helps us intervene earlier, before children suffer the worst harm or need to be removed from their parents' home.

We simply cannot afford to ignore this opportunity to assist professionals working to prevent child abuse identify children who need our help.

- By the end of 2013, a code of conduct will be in place on safe sharing of information about vulnerable children.
- By the end of 2014, a new Vulnerable Kids Information System will be implemented to bring together information about vulnerable children held by government agencies and frontline professionals. Security will be paramount.
- By the end of 2014, Government and frontline professionals will be able to access information on the children they are working with.

Working together, sharing the responsibility

The responsibility for care and protection of children doesn't rest with one agency alone. That's why the Government has told the Chief Executives of Social Development, Health, Education, Justice, NZ Police, Business, Innovation, and Employment (Housing) and Te Puni Kōkiri that they will work together and jointly be accountable for achieving results for vulnerable children.

At a community level, working together for vulnerable children requires the expertise, leadership, buy-in and commitment of professionals, community agencies, and communities themselves. Evidence shows that quality and timeliness are what matters, and right now this doesn't happen consistently.

To that end, the Government will work with those groups to design and implement a service to ensure vulnerable children are identified, assessed, and get the help they need.

A crucial part of that will be a single multi-agency plan for each vulnerable child, with someone taking responsibility for overseeing it and ensuring it is implemented.

The diagram on the page opposite is how we see this approach working:

Better identifying and supporting vulnerable children



Child Protect Line

Single point of contact (with a free phone line) for concerns about children:

- from the public, including children themselves
- from frontline professionals
- identified as vulnerable by agencies.

Step

1 Identification



To ensure vulnerable children get the right help, the Child Protect line will:

1. carry out an initial assessment to decide what needs to be done next
2. make sure the appropriate connection is made with:
 - Child, Youth and Family
 - Children's Teams
 - existing specialist and early intervention services (eg: parenting support or alcohol and drug programmes for parents)
 - universal services (eg: primary health services).

Children's Teams

Children's Teams (made up of key community professionals from across sectors) will ensure:

- vulnerable children's needs are assessed
- vulnerable children have a single plan covering all of their needs
- services are delivered, the plan monitored and reviewed, and outcomes achieved.

Step

2 Assessment and Planning



To ensure effective assessment and planning, Children's Teams will:

- bring together all the parties who are needed to address a vulnerable child's needs
- carry out a whole of child assessment, integrating all information
- ensure child-centered decision-making with family and professionals
- make an outcomes-based plan (with clear and measurable results).

Step

3 Multi-Agency Service Response



To ensure results, a lead professional will:

- co-ordinate delivery of the multi-agency plan
- monitor, track, review and revise plans (as needed) to ensure children achieve outcomes.

Right services at the right time

- services are prioritised for vulnerable children
- funded services reflect government priorities for vulnerable children



Common assessment and planning

New assessment tools (and risk modelling) ensure highly vulnerable children are identified and assisted.



Vulnerable kids information system

Provides appropriate access to available information and a place to lodge concerns. System supports risk assessment to predict the likelihood of children being abused or neglected.

Children receive a whole of child assessment of their needs.

System enables recording and sharing of information on highly vulnerable children.

Children have one plan, which addresses all the child's needs and is co-ordinated by a lead professional.

System supports integrated case management and ongoing monitoring of outcomes for children.

Child Protect line

- We will establish a Child Protect line as the point of contact for concerns about vulnerable children, as shown above and discussed earlier.

Regional leadership

- Create new Regional Children's Directors who will be responsible for co-ordinating services for vulnerable children. Regional Children's Directors will have four crucial roles:
 - Ensure the system for identifying and supporting vulnerable children is working well.
 - Make sure Children's Teams in their region are bringing key agencies together, assigning lead professionals to vulnerable children who need them, and creating and delivering joined-up intervention plans to improve the children's situation.
 - Take responsibility for other social sector provider contracts in their area.
 - Be accountable for improving outcomes for vulnerable children in their region.
- Children's Directors will report on the outcomes of vulnerable children in their region both publicly and to Ministers.

Community action – local Children's Teams

- Create new Children's Teams to bring together professionals in a local area to assess the needs of vulnerable children using a common assessment approach, form a joined up intervention plan where required, and assign a lead professional to ensure it is carried out.
- Ensure these vulnerable children get access to government education, health and welfare services to help carry out their joined-up plan.

There are, of course, existing inter-agency groups in many communities, and we won't double-up on the work already being done or add more meetings. Rather, the Children's Team approach will integrate current activities. For example, we will explore amalgamating interagency groups such as Strengthening Families, Family Violence Interagency Response, and regional social sector leadership together into one Children's Team.

Building on the best of what is already happening in the community is one of many reasons community leadership is vital to the success of this approach.

Many groups will have a crucial role to play, based on the child's circumstances and needs. For example: Family Start providers, mental health services, drug and alcohol treatment services, family violence intervention, parent education and family support groups, Whānau Ora providers, special education services, or others.

Though Child, Youth and Family and the Police will retain statutory care and protection responsibilities, they will act as a key part of an integrated system for the most vulnerable children.

Lead professionals

- Children's Directors will ensure each vulnerable child has a lead professional. This lead

professional will be the main point of contact, and will be responsible for developing a plan and ensuring the plan stays on track and is delivered.



Vulnerability and assessment tools

- New tools will be developed to help get a shared understanding and assessment of vulnerable children's needs. These whole of child assessment tools will be used by the Child Protect line, Children's Teams, government agencies, and by non-government agencies where appropriate.

If vulnerable children are to be found and helped we must use the same language and the same tools to talk about and assess their needs.

Government will work with frontline professionals to develop these tools, including looking at how the current range of tools fit with this approach. We will develop tools that respond to the age and stage of development of the children, such as the youth mental health assessment and the HEADDSS³ assessment used in schools.

Information from these assessments will be added into the information-sharing system to build a comprehensive picture of the child, their family circumstances and their needs.

- By December 2012, the location of two Children's Teams demonstration sites will be confirmed.
- By the end of 2013, Regional Children's Directors will be established.

³ HEADDSS is a widely-used assessment tool for identifying at-risk adolescents and covers: Home/health, Education/employment, Activities, Drugs, Depression, Safety, Sexuality.

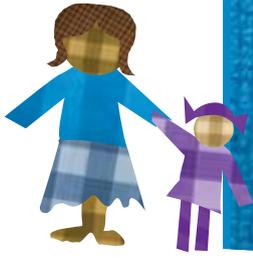
Focusing on what works

Public resources aren't limitless so the Government must focus on purchasing social services which make the greatest difference for our most vulnerable children, and deliver value for money for taxpayers.

With this in mind the Government will:

- Complete the Investing in Services for Outcomes approach over the next 18 months to refocus family and community funding contracted annually by the Ministry of Social Development:
 - This funding will be used to better support vulnerable children and their families, and the work of the Children's Teams.
 - There will be a fresh look at what vulnerable families and children need, who should address those needs, and how they should be funded.
 - There will be a focus on finding new and more effective ways to deliver services.
 - We will change existing programmes where required to better meet the needs of vulnerable children and their families.
 - Over time we will move funding from programmes that are having less impact to those achieving more for vulnerable children.
- Develop an integrated, stepped-care approach for the most vulnerable families, beginning in pregnancy, before the birth of the child. As part of this work, the Ministries of Health and Social Development are looking at how Well Child/Tamariki Ora and Family Start programmes can be better integrated.
- The new Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit in the Families Commission (SuPERU) will be tasked with finding ways to improve outcomes for vulnerable children. This work will drive a focus on learning what works and ensure that knowledge gets to frontline providers and funders. A first priority will be reviewing and reporting on effective parenting programmes.

- Within six months, how Well Child/Tamariki Ora and Family Start can be better integrated will be identified.
- By the end of 2013, SuPERU will review and report on effective parenting programmes.



Protect and respond

Even with the best community and preventative services in the world, sometimes the state needs to intervene to protect children. New Zealand was once a world leader in care and protection – it is time for us to lead again.

Children already known to care and protection agencies start at an enormous disadvantage to other children. Evidence clearly shows that the abuse and neglect they have suffered means they are more likely to have poor health, fail in school, end up in prison, become a parent at a very young age, and repeat negative patterns. The costs of this to the children and the country are enormous, with estimates that each abused child costs us all an extra three quarters of a million dollars over their lifetime. This is a waste of potential we simply can't ignore.

Our most vulnerable children need and deserve a high performing care and protection system which is uncompromisingly child-centred and dedicated to improving outcomes for vulnerable children.

Government will ensure that:

- Good outcomes for vulnerable children will be at the centre of child protection, legislation, policy, and practice, and reflected in how government agencies work together.
- All government agencies work together, and with other agencies and groups, in the interests of vulnerable children.
- All government agencies are responsive to the needs and concerns of families, communities and organisations, while being dedicated to the best interests of children.
- There are fewer, not more, layers in the system.
- Family Group Conferences are better used and integrated, with the child's needs placed first, and stronger engagement from health, education, iwi providers, non-government organisations.

Early support for the most vulnerable

Evidence from Gateway Assessments⁴ carried out in recent years shows that our most vulnerable children have serious unmet health and education needs. If this continues then these children may not be able to get an education, find a job and have a happy, healthy and productive life.

If we intervene early, these children stand a much better chance of growing into independent adults and becoming good parents.

A cross-agency care strategy

- Child, Youth and Family will develop a cross-agency Care Strategy to ensure children in state care get the services they need from government child protection, health and education agencies and other services.

⁴ Gateway Assessments were introduced in 2011 to ensure the needs of every child or young person entering care are identified and they get access to the right health and education services.

This Care Strategy will set out the outcomes we want to achieve for children in care, and who is responsible for achieving them, such as making sure children succeed in school. It will outline the work needed to achieve these outcomes. For example, how to ensure access to mental health and education services at a local level for children who come into care. Key government agencies will publicly report progress towards these outcomes.

Iwi pre-approved caregivers

- Child, Youth and Family will establish a register of pre-approved iwi, hapū and, where possible, extended-family caregivers, to be available at short notice to provide a safe home for tamariki who have to be taken from an unsafe situation. Iwi will be invited to work with Child, Youth and Family to develop this register, which will encourage whānau placements.

Child, Youth and Family will use caregivers from the register in preference to non-whānau caregivers for Māori children in care. This recognises the vital stake that iwi, hapū, and extended family have in the life and future prospects of their tamariki. Child, Youth and Family will work with iwi to ensure these caregivers get the support they need to provide quality care.

Attracting and supporting quality caregivers

Government wants the best possible caregivers for children who have had to be removed from their homes. Though resources are limited, it is important to recognise that people who offer a home for life to a child in care are going to need time and support to manage the transition of this child into their family. These initiatives will ease that transition.

- Contract non-government organisations to offer ongoing support to families who take children in a permanent or Home for Life placement.
- Extend Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, which is being trialled in Child, Youth and Family, to more caregivers of high and complex-needs children.
- Expand the number of specialist-trained caregivers for high-needs and high-risk teenagers.
- Review paid parental leave provisions to ensure the provisions applying to adoptive parents also work for families who give children from care a Home for Life.
- Provide extra financial assistance to grandparents raising grandchildren and other kin carers.

Transition to adulthood

- Give every 16 and 17-year-old who is moving from Child, Youth and Family care to independence support from a Ministry of Social Development provider to help them make the transition. The new Youth Service, which was launched in August 2012, will help these young people re-engage in education and training, and help them plan for the future so they do not need to rely on a benefit when they turn 18. The provider will work closely with the Child, Youth and Family social worker to ensure the transition from care is well managed.

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- Within six months, a cross-agency Care Strategy will be developed to ensure children in care get the services they need.
 - By the end of 2013, establish a register of pre-approved iwi caregivers.

Professionals helping children



It is important that everyone in organisations working with and for children and young people – that is, those who plan, manage, and deliver services (including volunteers who have charge of children) – agrees to take a child-centred approach. This means children’s needs come first. This sounds simple and commonsense, but the principle is so important that it needs to be written into policies, guidelines and, in some cases, legislation.

People working with children have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of those children. This principle will extend to all social sector organisations funded by government and be a central part of their practices and policies.

New screening process for people working with children

- A new process for vetting and screening people working directly with children (including certain volunteers who are in charge of, or work alone with, children (but excluding volunteers working with groups of children such as sports teams) will be set out in law and given effect through training and registration, and employment and contracting relationships. This process will ensure that if known child abusers attempt to work with children, they will be identified and the children protected.

Minimum standards and competencies

- Introduce a tiered set of core competencies and minimum quality standards that reflect the particular requirements of different roles within the core children’s workforce. The need to meet these competencies and standards will be set out in guidelines, but law change will also be considered if required.

Though many organisations working with children have standards and systems, there are no commonly agreed core competencies or minimum standards for the core children’s workforce. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, having a set of core competencies and minimum standards will provide consistency across the workforce and build public confidence that the workforce has the skills and knowledge to do the job.

For example, the competencies of someone using an initial vulnerability assessment checklist will be different from those required of someone doing a whole of child assessment.

- Within six months, a new vetting and screening process for people working directly with children will be developed.
- By the end of 2015, a tiered set of core competencies and minimum quality standards will be introduced for the children’s workforce.

Dealing with abusers

New Zealanders have made it clear they have had enough of people who abuse children in their care. These concerns have been heard and the Government will introduce a range of tough new measures targeting people who present a high risk of continuing to hurt children.

Curtailing “guardianship rights” of abusive parents to support children

- Investigate a law change that will curtail, or limit, the guardianship rights of parents who present an ongoing serious risk to their children. This decision would be made by the Family Court, rather than Child, Youth and Family, and only where the court thinks it necessary to limit the parent’s power to disrupt the child’s life.

Some parents do present an ongoing and serious risk to their children. While most children will go back to, or at least have contact with, their parents, we need to be able to ensure children who need a safe and secure fresh start, get it. Limiting the guardianship rights of parents is one of the most serious steps a government can take, but we need to be prepared to make this hard call to ensure the most seriously abused children can get the permanent, secure, and loving home they deserve.

Child abuse prevention orders

- Introduce tough new restrictions for adults who present an ongoing risk to children. New child abuse prevention orders (civil orders) will allow a judge to place restrictions in situations where an individual poses a high risk to a child or children in the future. Restrictions may include taking action to advise the parents or caregiver of the child and to remove the high-risk adult from the situation if appropriate.

Another potential restriction is that when a child has been removed from a home due to serious child abuse at the hands of a parent, the existence of a child abuse prevention order could mean that another baby born into that situation is removed from that parent’s care. Though the court will make the decision about whether to remove the child there is an expectation that the child will be removed from the care of the parents, unless it can be shown that this is not in the best interests of the child.

New tracking and monitoring of offenders

- Flagging high-risk offenders, and people subject to child abuse prevention orders, in government information systems to ensure they are not having unsupervised contact with children. For example, we will share Corrections and Work and Income information so that if serious offenders and people subject to child abuse prevention orders are found to be in a house with children, action can be taken to keep those children safe.

Stopping abusers working with children

- Stronger controls on who can work with children. Information sharing will be used to track serious child abusers and ensure they are not able to work with children.

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- By the end of 2013, introduce legislation to allow the Court to make child abuse prevention orders to restrict the activities of people who pose a high risk to children.
 - By the end of 2013, introduce legislation, including special guardianship orders, for safe and stable permanent care for children who have been removed from their parents.

Mentoring and supporting



- The Government will look to establish an independent trust to support awards and educational grants for vulnerable children to succeed in school, and go on to tertiary study or vocational training.
- Adults will be encouraged to contribute time to help young people make the best of themselves.

The most vulnerable children have a tough time, and what we want more than anything for them is a safe, stable, strong future. People and companies can play their part by helping vulnerable children who have needed care and protection to pursue their dreams through success in school and tertiary or vocational study. That's where schemes such as this independent trust come in.

We also all know what a difference a positive adult role model can make as young people are growing up. Mentoring can give them new and positive life experiences, while providing a valuable experience for the mentor.

Community groups and non-government organisations run a range of mentoring programmes where adults can contribute time to help young people. People are encouraged to sign up to help a young person learn from their positive example.

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- In the first six months, promote mentoring of vulnerable children.
 - In the first six months, announce the scholarships programme.

When agencies get it wrong

An independent review of complaints processes relating to Child, Youth and Family

- There will be an independent review into how the Ministry of Social Development handles complaints about actions taken under the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act.
- The Minister for Social Development will appoint an independent reviewer to consider whether changes need to be made, including the possibility of establishing an independent complaints mechanism.

This review reflects the many submissions on the Green Paper for Vulnerable Children that felt strongly that there needed to be an independent complaints body, similar to the Independent Police Conduct Authority.

- Within six months, commission an independent review of the existing Child, Youth and Family complaints processes.

Building on firm foundations



The actions set out in this White Paper build on and enhance a strong base of support, protection and care that already exists in New Zealand for children and families.

New Zealand has built one of the best and strongest health, education, and social support systems in the world, and one of the most efficient justice systems.

Besides free maternity services, free Well Child/Tamariki Ora support, free doctors' care for children under six, heavily subsidised early childhood education, and free schooling for every child, there is a range of other services available of a more specialist or targeted nature, all designed to prevent vulnerability growing into harm.

This includes:

- Additional classroom help for children with learning difficulties.
- Disability support services for parents and children.
- Primary mental healthcare for mothers suffering from depression.
- Drug and alcohol intervention for a parent whose substance abuse puts their child at risk.
- Parenting and relationship support for struggling parents.

The actions in this White Paper will build on these services to ensure public money is going to exactly where it is needed.

Recent actions

Supporting vulnerable children through more efficient and responsive public services has been given priority in two government initiatives launched this year.

Better Public Services

- Increasing participation in early childhood education, increasing infant immunisation rates, reducing the incidence of rheumatic fever, and reducing the number of assaults on children are aims of the "Better Public Services" key result areas launched in March 2012. The theme of *Supporting Vulnerable Children* represented the first time that specific goals to protect vulnerable children have been set out by government.
- The Supporting Vulnerable Children Result Action Plan, which was released in August 2012, includes specific actions and targets so progress can be measured:
 - By 2016, some 98 per cent of children starting school will have participated in quality early childhood education.
 - Increase infant immunisation rates so that 95 per cent of eight-month-olds are fully immunised by December 2014 and this is maintained through to 30 June 2017.
 - Reduce the incidence of rheumatic fever by two thirds to 1.4 cases per 100,000 people by June 2017.

- Halt the rise in children experiencing physical abuse and reduce current numbers by 5 per cent by 2017.

Other Better Public Services key result areas and initiatives also contribute to better outcomes for vulnerable children. They include:

- Action to achieve the goal of more young people gaining at least NCEA Level 2.
- Reducing the number of people on a benefit for more than 12 months, so ensuring more children enjoy the financial, social, and wellbeing benefits of having a parent in work.
- Benefit reforms which include simple common sense parental obligations such as enrolling a child with a doctor or school and ensuring children take advantage of early childhood education opportunities.

Easier access to health and education

Universal services in the early years of children’s lives such as maternity care, access to a doctor, early childhood education and Well Child/Tamariki Ora make a big contribution to stopping children becoming vulnerable in the first place.

But the most vulnerable can sometimes miss out on these services, so they are being made more accessible to vulnerable groups by way of:

- Improving access for Māori, Pasifika, and children from vulnerable communities through the Early Childhood Education Participation Programme by increasing the number of Early Childhood Education Centres and adapting programmes to suit their communities.
- Ensuring that vulnerable children are supported in the education system, particularly when they move frequently between schools, to keep them in school and get the learning support they need.
- The Youth Guarantee programme which creates new work, education, and training opportunities for young people, including free vocational courses.
- Better identification of vulnerable pregnant mothers and linking them to Lead Maternity Carers and other support.
- Improving the coverage of Well Child/Tamariki Ora and ensuring additional visits are directed where they are needed.



A productive and competitive economy creating jobs

A working breadwinner is the best form of security a family can get.

- Building a more productive and competitive economy to create jobs is at the top of the Government's action plan. Jobs bring financial and social rewards, building family strength and pride. A strengthened economy will create jobs and the flow-on effect of those will enhance every part of New Zealand life.
- Recent welfare reforms which focus on helping more people back to work, with the financial and social benefits that brings, will play a big part in preventing vulnerability.
- Programmes that support children to achieve in education, such as those delivered through the Youth Guarantee, the new Youth Service, and enhanced education and training opportunities, combine to get young people ready for work and help grow our economy.
- Investing in our productive infrastructure, such as our transport and broadband networks, to help grow jobs and strengthen our economic performance.

Improving incomes and opportunity

Though income poverty alone does not cause or excuse child abuse, we know that struggling to make ends meet places extra stress on families.

We also know that it is what parents do that matters most.

Many children live in a different sort of poverty – poverty of affection, poverty of protection, poverty of expectation, poverty of educational stimulation, poverty of positive role models. This poverty scars the lives of too many children.

Reinforcing the actions to improve services and opportunities set out in this paper, there are several pieces of work underway aimed at addressing income poverty, including:

- The Children's Commissioner's Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty published an "Issues and Options" report in August 2012.
- The Ministerial Committee on Poverty, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Whānau Ora. This Committee will present its first report later this year.

The Ministerial Committee is focused on supporting New Zealanders from all backgrounds to move out of long-term poverty, tackling the impacts of poverty and ensuring the Government's interventions are effective and delivering value for money for taxpayers. Many recommendations in the Children's Commissioner's report – for example, high trust contracting, government-community partnerships, simplifying the benefit system by reducing the number of benefits, introducing new social obligations for parents on welfare – support changes already underway. Other recommendations will be considered further.

Justice

Recent changes to penalties for child abusers and those who protect them include:

- Offences against children were made an aggravating factor during sentencing in 2008. This applies across all offences and means offenders get longer sentences if the offending relates to a child.
- Amending the Crimes Act in 2011 to:
 - Introduce a new offence that means any member of a household with frequent contact with a child and who knows a child is at risk from abuse but fails to take reasonable steps to protect the child may be prosecuted.
 - Broaden the scope of the duties of parents and those with actual responsibility for children. These people will be held liable if they fail to take reasonable steps to protect a child from injury. Thoughtlessness or ignorance is no longer a defence, and penalties for ill-treatment or neglect of a child have been doubled to a maximum of 10 years' imprisonment.



Next steps

It's up to all of us. There is no justification and no excuse for child abuse. Preventing abuse requires each and every one of us to play our part.

Government will provide leadership and opportunities for everyone to get involved. It will:

- Work with professional groups such as paediatricians, lead maternity carers, social workers, GPs, nurses and teachers on our plan of action for vulnerable children.
- Work in communities and with iwi to draw on local expertise, leadership, passion and commitment to make a difference for vulnerable children.
- Work with organisations to build the professional workforce and services we need to protect our children.
- Work with families, whānau, hapū and iwi who want change, in their family, or in their community.
- Work with individuals to make the change.
- Bring everyone together, with a common goal.
- Keep the focus on children.
- Continue to monitor and review its programmes as well as national and international research to ensure that what is effective is reinforced, to amend what is less successful, and to incorporate additional approaches where appropriate.
- Introduce a Vulnerable Children's Bill to draw together the legal changes proposed in this paper, including the arrangements for Regional Children's Directors and Children's Teams, information-sharing, and tougher penalties for abusers.

There are opportunities for every New Zealander to become involved in making this plan a reality.

But the greatest difference of all will be the one that parents, families, whānau, and communities make in the lives of the children they protect and nurture.

There really is no excuse. Our children depend on us. On you.

