



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

Care and Protection Resource Panels

Consultation Summary Report

1. INTRODUCTION

Care and Protection Resource Panels (Resource Panels) were established under the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families (CYPF) Act 1989. The CYPF Act sets out their statutory functions which include: providing advice to the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services (CYF) about individual cases of child abuse and neglect; promoting the co-ordination of services by the community to children and young people in need of care and protection; and advising CYF on the appointment of Care and Protection Co-ordinators.

In December 2000, former Principal Youth Court Judge Mick Brown, in his report *Care and Protection is about Adult Behaviour: The Ministerial review of the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services*, recommended that "...the role, effectiveness and reporting lines of Resource Panels be evaluated." In response to this recommendation, a review of Resource Panels is being conducted as a specific Area of Action under the Care and Protection Blueprint 2003.

The Ministry of Social Development distributed the *Care and Protection Resource Panels Discussion Document* in November 2002, which was developed in consultation with CYF. Seven workshops with CYF staff and Resource Panel members were held in a variety of CYF site offices in mid-2002 to guide the development of the document.

Submissions in response to the document were requested by 14 February 2003. A feedback guide containing the complete set of questions was also provided. In total, 100 responses were received in the form of completed feedback guides, along with a further eight written submissions. This report provides:

- a summary of the responses received under each question identified in the discussion document and feedback guide
- demographic information about the people who responded to the discussion document
- information about the next steps in the review of Resource Panels.

2. QUESTIONS

Question 1: How important is it to bring a multi-disciplinary and community perspective to care and protection processes?

Most respondents (94%) considered a multi-disciplinary/community perspective to be an “essential” or “very important” characteristic of the care and protection process. In support of this view, respondents cited the need to consider care and protection issues from a range of different perspectives. The complexity of care and protection issues in an increasingly culturally diverse and complex society was also noted. A number of respondents made the point that care and protection should not be regarded solely as a matter for a government agency and that a multi-disciplinary and community perspective ensured the sharing of knowledge, skills and information as well as providing support to CYF.

Question 2: Are Resource Panels the best way of ensuring a multi-disciplinary and community perspective is applied to statutory social work?

Almost 80 percent of respondents agreed that Resource Panels are the best way of bringing a multi-disciplinary and community perspective to statutory social work. However, some respondents felt that there was scope for improvement to enable Resource Panels to meet their full potential. It was also suggested that Resource Panels should not be seen as the only way CYF can access a multi-disciplinary and community perspective.

The following alternatives were suggested:

- consultations/conferences with selected people, professionals, agencies on a case-by-case basis, particularly in relation to cultural advice
- the use and/or expansion of existing mechanisms, for example, Strengthening Families.

Question 3: What does cultural advice mean in the context of care and protection? Are Resource Panels the best way of providing that advice?

One theme among those respondents who answered this question was that cultural advice was information about how to approach and work with a child within the context of their family/whānau and community in a way that acknowledges and responds to their cultural background.

Specific examples of cultural advice included advice on:

- the values and attitudes that a family may hold (for example, in relation to gender, family violence etc)
- mores and customs
- who to approach and how
- authority, respect, language, and resources in the community/for the family (for example, iwi support)
- understanding the meaning of abuse, domestic violence, mental health and community within different cultural contexts.

One respondent noted that cultural advice could inform why a particular behaviour is maintained by a person, whether it is consistent with the norms of an ethnic group or is specific to that individual. For another respondent, providing cultural advice involved challenging whether cultural factors had been acknowledged and given sufficient weight.

There were varying responses to the question of whether Resource Panels are the best way of providing cultural advice. It was, however, noted that this would depend on the make up of the Resource Panel and the extent to which it reflected the diversity within the community.

Question 4A: Does the Resource Panel in your area provide advice to CYF Social Workers and Care and Protection Co-ordinators?

There was general agreement (92%) that Resource Panels fulfil the role of providing advice to CYF staff.

If yes, how satisfactory is the process whereby the Resource Panel provides advice to CYF Social Workers and Care and Protection Co-ordinators?

Seventy-six percent of respondents considered the process was operating in a “satisfactory” or “very satisfactory” way. Reasons commonly cited by respondents as influencing the degree of satisfaction with the process included:

- the time available for consultation with the Resource Panel, how the consultation was undertaken and the degree of importance CYF staff appeared to place on the consultation
- the nature of the relationship and degree of trust between the Resource Panel and CYF
- the extent to which there was a common understanding of respective roles and functions.

Question 4B: Does the Resource Panel in your area provide advice to members of the Police?

Fifty-four percent of respondents indicated that their Resource Panel does not provide advice to the Police. Some respondents noted that the Police refer cases direct to CYF rather than to the Resource Panel, so that the advice is thereby given to CYF, not the Police. Other specific comments were that:

- many Resource Panels have a Police representative
- demands on Police resources limit the ability of the Police to develop relationships with Resource Panels.

Question 4c: Does the Resource Panel in your area promote co-ordination of the provision of services by the community to children and young persons in need of care or protection and to the families and family groups of such children and young persons?

Forty-five percent of all those who responded agreed that this statutory function was being carried out. However, 55 percent of the respondents from rural areas agreed that this statutory function was being carried out, compared with 48 percent of the respondents from the non-major cities and towns and only 33 percent of the respondents from the major urban areas.

Those respondents who considered that Resource Panels were not promoting the co-ordination of services noted Resource Panel members’ limitations in terms of time and resources. Other respondents noted that the role was being fulfilled by other mechanisms, for example, by CYF social workers/liason officers, through Strengthening Families initiatives and through informal networking of panel members in the community.

There was a comment that both the nature of the role of promoting such co-ordination of the provision of services and what it entails is not clear.

Question 4D: Does the Resource Panel in your area provide advice to CYF on matters relating to the appointment of Care and Protection Co-ordinators?

Thirty-two percent of respondents agreed that Resource Panels provided such advice to CYF, compared with 40 percent who disagreed and 28 percent who did not know. The responses suggested differences in the way Resource Panels participated in the process and differing views on the appropriate nature of that participation.

Question 5: Are there other functions that the Resource Panel in your area fulfils in addition to the statutory functions of Resource Panels under the CYPF Act?

Fifty percent of respondents replied “no”, 33 percent replied “yes”, and 27 percent did not know. Additional functions noted by respondents included:

- assistance to social workers on a personal basis, for example, accompanying home/family visits, escorting, minder work, mentoring, support and providing information, contacts and advice
- counselling
- reporting to CYF senior management and Ministers on trends, issues etc
- performing an advocacy role on behalf of CYF for office resources or staffing, and to the Commissioner for Children on matters of concern.

Question 6: Should the key role of Resource Panels be to provide advice and information to CYF staff?

Most respondents (89%) agreed that the key role of Resource Panels should be to provide advice and information to CYF staff. Respondents noted that advice and information could include:

- providing suggestions on the approach to take on a specific case
- providing a critique of the response proposed by a social worker
- challenging the information held by the social worker.

It was also noted that Resource Panels need not be an exclusive source of advice.

Question 7: How satisfactory is the current status or authority of Resource Panel's advice to CYF staff and members of the Police?

Overall, 73 percent of respondents considered the current status or authority of Resource Panel's advice to be satisfactory.

Some respondents suggested that a Resource Panel's advice and recommendations should be recorded on CYF's CYRAS¹ database. When the Panel's advice is not followed, the reasons why could also be recorded. It was also suggested that clear and consistent feedback channels should be established, and a clear process put in place to address any concerns about decisions made on particular cases or about processes being followed.

Respondents noted that giving greater authority to Resource Panels' advice would impact on the lines of responsibility and accountability and on the purpose of Resource Panels. A common view was that defining more precisely the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities would go some way towards both addressing any concerns and enabling more structured and beneficial relationships to develop.

Question 8: Should Resource Panels continue to have a role in promoting the co-ordination of services?

Fifty-nine percent of respondents agreed with this question. Many respondents noted that maintaining the role would facilitate linkages between groups and also enable Resource Panels to broaden their contacts and knowledge of community services. Some respondents noted that the role should be more clearly defined and resourced appropriately if it was to continue.

Other respondents noted that the primary role of Resource Panels should be to provide advice and information. There were also comments made that as Resource Panel members may not have the time or resource to undertake this role, it should be done more informally. It was also noted that other agencies can pick up this role or are doing it now, for example, education liaison workers, community liaison social workers and Strengthening Families co-ordinators.

Question 9: Should Resource Panels continue to have a role in advising CYF on the appointment of Care and Protection Co-ordinators?

Most respondents (76%) agreed that Resource Panels should continue this role.

Respondents noted that the role brings a wider community perspective and, in particular, a cultural perspective to the process. It also reinforces community involvement in and responsibility for care and protection.

Other respondents felt that CYF should be responsible for the appointment process and, as Resource Panels are not involved in the appointment of social workers, that they should similarly not be involved in the appointment of Care and Protection Co-ordinators.

Question 10: How would you describe the relationship between CYF and the Resource Panel in your area?

Of the respondents who answered this question, the relationship was rated as "excellent" by 20 percent, as "good" by 58 percent and as "fair" by 22 percent. No respondents rated the relationship as being "poor".

¹ Care and Protection, Youth Justice, Residential and Adoption Systems database

Some respondents felt that CYF staff only consult with the Resource Panel to meet their legal obligations. It was also noted that some CYF staff may be reluctant to accept advice and become defensive rather than engage with the Resource Panel. On the other hand, it was suggested that social workers' workloads and the frequency of staff changes may make it more difficult to develop good relationships.

Question 11: Is there a CYF liaison person for the Resource Panel in your area?

Of the respondents who answered this question, 49 percent said that there was a CYF liaison person for their Resource Panel. Of those respondents who answered "yes", 61 percent agreed that this had facilitated the development of a good working relationship. Responses indicated that there are CYF liaison officers at different levels, including at management level. Some appear to be formally appointed and have a clearly defined role. Others may have a more informal arrangement. The responses indicated that at some sites the liaison person is located at another office and that this has implications for their ability to develop good relationships with the Resource Panel.

Respondents noted that benefits may be enhanced if the liaison person:

- is located at the site where the Resource Panel meets
- is available to meet or liaise at times other than the more formal advice/consultation meetings
- has a clearly defined role that is distinguished from social workers and Care and Protection Co-ordinators
- has the support of site management.

Question 12: Is there a need to extend the role of the CYF National Office Resource Panel liaison person?

Thirty-three percent of respondents answered "yes", whereas 42 percent said "don't know" and 25 percent replied "no".

Some respondents noted that an enhanced role could: provide increased guidance, support and co-operation; enable regular appraisal of Resource Panel members' skills and knowledge base; and facilitate ongoing training. Other respondents felt that the current arrangements are sufficient, that a national liaison person was not close enough to the situation to be effective, and that any enhancement should therefore be at a regional/local level.

Question 13: Does the Resource Panel in your area have a Maori/iwi representative?

Eighty-eight percent of respondents answered that the Resource Panel in their area did have a Māori/iwi representative, 7 percent did not know and 5 percent replied "no".

Question 14: How difficult is it to attract people with the appropriate skills to be part of a Resource Panel?

Sixteen percent of respondents considered it "very difficult" to attract such people to Resource Panels, 33 percent considered it "quite difficult", and 12 percent considered it "difficult". Thirty-eight percent of respondents considered that it was "not difficult" to attract Resource Panel members.

Question 15: How can we attract more people with the appropriate skills to participate in the work of Resource Panels?

Respondents made the following suggestions:

- Resource Panels should be promoted as an important community service
- relationships between Resource Panels and CYF should be improved and their respective roles should be clarified
- budget allocations should be realistic and appointments should not be influenced by the prospect of CYF not having to pay fees and allowances to an appointee.

Question 16: What is the best way of building and maintaining the capabilities, skills and knowledge of Resource Panel members?

The discussion document provided three options for building and maintaining the capabilities of Resource Panel members. The percentage of respondents who agreed with specific functions is as follows:

Increased opportunities for networking 57%

Regular Resource Panel newsletter 51%

More training opportunities 68%

Suggestions relating to expanded training opportunities included:

- training on roles and expectations; legislation relating to care and protection; CYF policies and procedures and the processes / tools available to CYF
- involving Resource Panel members in appropriate CYF staff training and vice versa
- learning about the roles and responsibilities of other professionals in the care and protection sector.

Question 17: Are there barriers that prevent Resource Panel members from accessing the training currently available?

Sixty-eight percent of respondents indicated there are such barriers, compared with 18 percent who did not know and 14 percent who answered that there were no such barriers. Ninety percent of the responses from Resource Panels said there are such barriers.

The main barriers to accessing training identified by respondents included:

- fitting training with work commitments
- the need for greater flexibility in the delivery of training. For example, some respondents indicated that training was only available in main centres making it more difficult for Resource Panel members from other areas to participate.

Question 18: Should Resource Panels be funded by, and accountable to, CYF?

Seventy-seven percent of respondents felt that Resource Panels should continue to be funded by and accountable to CYF. Some respondents noted that funding and accountability arrangements could be amended to bring an improved status to Resource Panels and that Resource Panels should have a greater ability to control their own operations and greater responsibility for their finances. Specific suggestions included:

- a national funding pool be established with ring-fenced allocations to each Resource Panel
- funding, training and reviews should be managed centrally from CYF National Office
- Resource Panels need to be seen to be more “independent” of site office management, especially concerning budgets.

Other respondents suggested alternative funding and accountability structures, such as contracting key community groups to provide Resource Panel members and/or involving a “neutral” organisation such as the Office of the Commissioner for Children.

A number of respondents raised the issue of accountability, noting that there are different forms of accountability which need to be defined and understood.

Question 19: What do you see as the purpose of the Resource Panel Annual Report process?

Respondents identified the following broad purposes:

- ensuring the Resource Panel is accountable and that the statutory responsibilities are met
- to provide information to CYF, the Minister, the Commissioner for Children and the community on a range of issues such as: the Resource Panel’s activities, successes, highlights, concerns, trends, developments, and co-ordination initiatives

- a mechanism for Resource Panels to consider their usefulness and for reviewing processes, working arrangements and relationships with CYF.

Question 20: How effective is the Annual Report process in maintaining Resource Panels' accountability to CYF? Do you have any suggestions for change?

A range of comments were made in relation to the effectiveness of Annual Reports. Some respondents felt that the Annual Report process had a limited capacity to address local concerns or ensure accountability.

Some respondents made suggestions for improving the process. One suggestion was that Annual Reports be used to promote best practice and to initiate process improvements. This could be done by CYF and Resource Panel Chairs meeting to provide feedback, swap ideas and brainstorm how to get the best advice. Another suggestion was that the Resource Panel should seek input from the CYF site office about the effectiveness of the Resource Panel's advice. A similar idea was the introduction of a type of Resource Panel member performance review process associated with the Annual Report process. It was also proposed that CYF National Office prepare a national newsletter setting out the issues raised in the Annual Reports and indicating the process and timeframe for responding to the issues.

Question 21: Are the current mechanisms for addressing problems that Resource Panels encounter sufficient?

Overall, only 38 percent of respondents agreed that the current mechanisms are sufficient to address any problems that Resource Panels encounter, compared with 43 percent that disagreed and 19 percent that were not able to make a judgement.

Some respondents were not aware of the current mechanisms for addressing problems. Other respondents made suggestions for improvement, for example:

- introducing performance review procedures and formal evaluations to assess the effectiveness of Resource Panels
- more regular and direct liaison with CYF National Office.

It was also suggested that the appropriateness of the mechanisms depends to some degree on the attitudes of the CYF site, the value placed on Resource Panels and the levels of energy, goodwill and time.

Question 22: Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about Care and Protection Resource Panels?

A range of comments were made in response to this question. Many of the comments repeated points recorded under earlier questions. Ideas not covered under other questions included:

- Resource Panels are an important, but under-utilised, resource providing key links to the community. Efforts are also needed to ensure Resource Panels become an integral element of the "culture" of CYF offices.
- The process for selecting Resource Panel members needs to be more open, transparent and based on clear criteria or guidelines. The Resource Panel should be involved to provide community representation, along with the local CYF office and the Chief Executive (via head office representative). The reappointment process also needs to exhibit the same features.
- Resource Panels are a way of overcoming concerns about high staff turnover and lack of retention of local experience and knowledge, high caseloads and inexperience of staff generally.
- There should be more attention to the relationship management side, for example, acknowledging letters of nomination promptly, thanking employers for permitting staff to be panel members and letters of thanks on completion of membership.
- Resource Panel meetings should have independent (professional) chairs.

3. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The *Care and Protection Resource Panels Feedback Guide* sought demographic information about the respondents.

Not all of the 100 respondents who completed the *Feedback Guide* either filled in this section or completed it in such a way as to make clear the categories in which they wished to be included. Information on those respondents who completed the section is summarised in the table below.

Category and Question	No.
Respondents representing a Group	32
Of which: CYF Service Delivery Unit	5
Resource Panel member	21
Non-government organisation	2
Other Government agencies	4
Individual Respondents	54
Of which: CYF Employee	13
Resource Panel member	37
Other	4
Of which: New Zealand European	44
Māori	9
Pacific Peoples	1
Location of Respondents	91
Of which: Major urban area*	31
Other city or town	32
Rural area	28

* Major urban area was defined as Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch or Dunedin.

4. NEXT STEPS

The feedback we received in response to the *Care and Protection Resource Panels Discussion Document* will inform the development of policy advice to the Minister of Social Services and Employment on options for improving the operation of the Resource Panels. The Ministry of Social Development, in consultation with CYF and the Blueprint Steering Group, will report to the Minister by 30 September 2003.

We would like to thank everybody who participated in this consultation process for the time and thought that went into providing feedback. Your input will greatly assist the review process.