



CYF Review

let's get real

Key discussion points from the
symposium on the CYF Review

In conversation – remodelling CYF

Lucy Sandford-Reed, ANZASW; and David McNabb Council for Social Work Education Aotearoa/
New Zealand

As many of you have also voiced, we have concerns about the current CYF Review. Our contention is the review is not wide enough, instead relying on a siloed approach to fix a wider problem. We also believe the continued focus on a narrow outcome-focused approach, with black-and-white “results”, is a crude measure and fails to put children, families and communities at the centre of our system. So while we have many, many good practitioners and pockets of excellence, the overall system is failing our children, our families, and our communities.

The review also signals changes to the investment approach within the social services system that are of concern. This approach seems to define New Zealand citizens in a one-dimensional way as “clients” or “choosing consumers”. In the case of children and families this is a particularly worrying viewpoint. There seems to be an emphasis on privatising services. We believe this could have long-lasting effects on the system (as recent privatisation issues in other sectors have illustrated).

Through the establishment of the panel and the terms of reference, the CYF Review also undermines the sector and social workers. For example, there is a valid concern about possible legislative changes to the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989 which may deprofessionalise social worker roles. Unitec lecturer Peter Matthewson has written an insightful blog on this issue.⁴

While the review does not have a real consultation process built in, we, like all of you who are here today, feel this is too an important a discussion to be left out of. So below is our starter for 10 to add to the conversation.

What does a good system look like?

We need to agree on what our expectations are for social work. We suggest the following as a starting point:

- being responsive to community, family and individual needs and aspirations
- quality, effective and responsive practitioners
- a contracting environment where there is an ability to build and sustain relationships
- a system that is based on intervention and prevention
- a national strategy where state services serve a central role, with the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) clearly understood, valued, supported and properly resourced
- a system that encourages the input of practitioners, providers and users.

Supporting a robust review

The current CYF Review needs to be broadened to ensure the following:

- consider CYF in context of the larger social services system, particularly with a focus on the needs for CYF and NGO services that advocate and challenge ongoing systemic injustice that perpetuates cycles of poverty and abuse rather than just reacting after the fact
- engage with children, youth and families
- take on board recommendations from professional gatherings such as this one
- look at caseloads, staffing and administration time (see Figures 1 and 2)

4. *Modernisation, Deprofessionalisation, and the Role of the Private Sector* by Peter Matthewson. Retrieved from: www.reimaginingocialwork.nz/2015/05/modernisation-deprofessionalisation-and-the-role-of-the-private-sector/.

- consider the data and knowledge available, and investigate where there are gaps in our knowledge
- review caseloads and programmes in terms of quality as well as quantity.

Putting New Zealanders at the centre of decision-making

The needs of people who use social services needs to be at the centre of all decision-making and should be the core of any review. That includes:

- showing respect and understanding that they are the experts about their own and their family’s needs
- listening to them
- making accurate information accessible to them
- letting them control their own lives and be active partners in solving their own problems
- understanding that individuals act within whānau and communities.

Respecting the profession

In addition, social workers need to be valued as part of the solution and meaningfully included in any review. They bring valuable knowledge and understanding of issues, including:

- relationship skills
- working toward safe outcomes for vulnerable people
- constructively challenging and working alongside high-needs and multi-stressed families
- decision-making based on user-determined decisions
- informed knowledge of possibilities and limits
- ability to locate service users in the wider whānau and community context
- effective advocacy and access to services
- sustained commitment to the welfare of people and to a social just society.

And not to be underestimated, social workers often bring a sense of hope.

Figure 1. Proportion of available social worker time spent in contact with children, young people and their family/whānau.

Source: Qualitative review of social worker caseload, casework and workload management, published by MSD in 2014 (page 72).

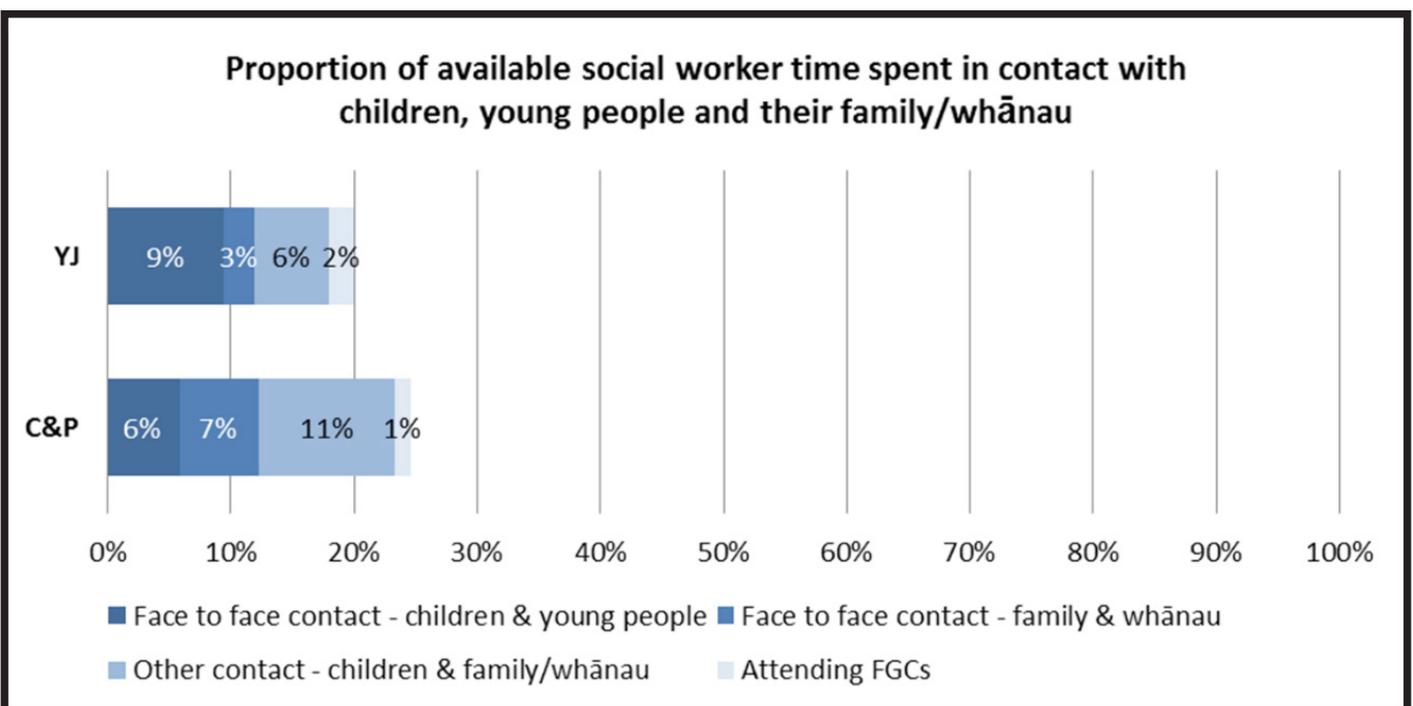
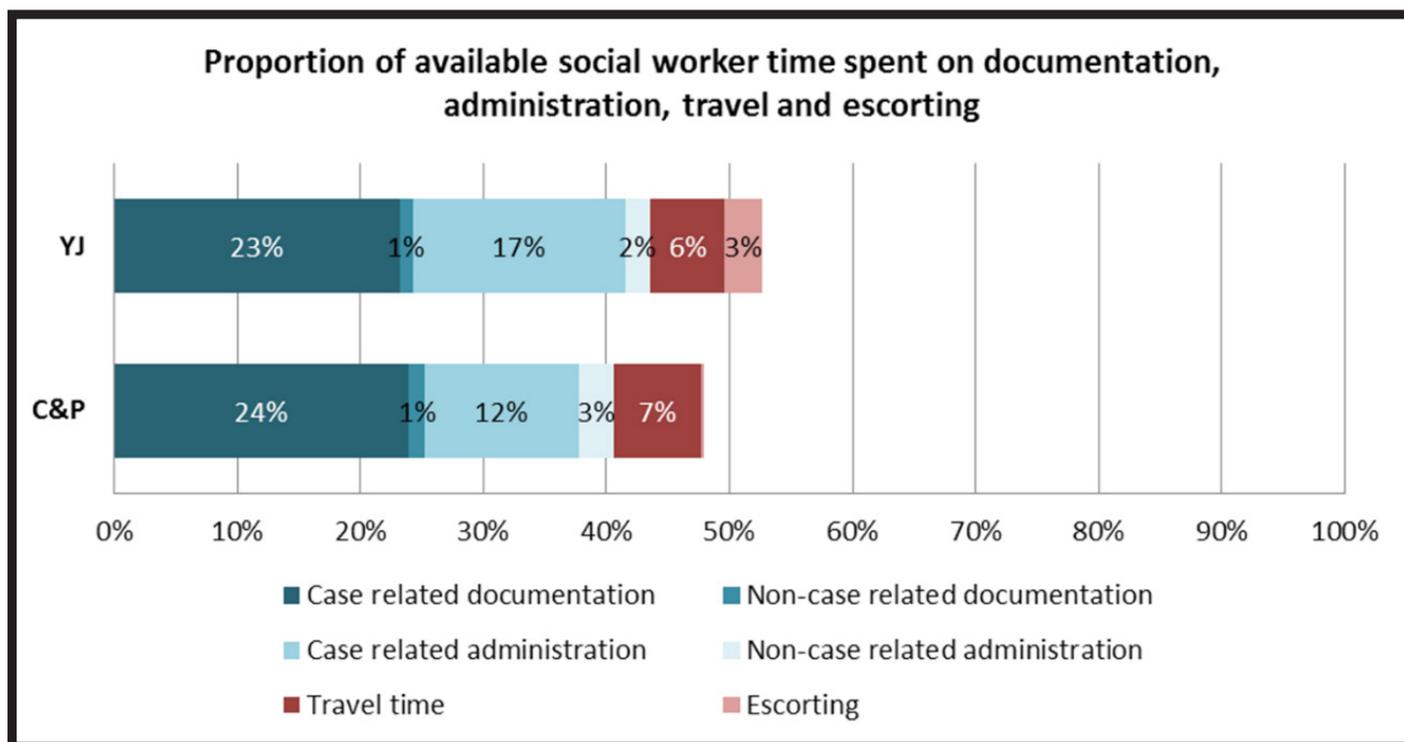


Figure 2. Proportion of available social worker time spent on documentation, administration, travel and escorting. Source: Qualitative review of social worker caseload, casework and workload management, published by MSD in 2014 (page 75).



What next?

First, put children, families and communities at the centre of any review or decisions.

The review then needs to look at who our social services interact with and how we do it. Where are we doing it well? Where – and with who – are we failing? As part of the review we need to understand why we succeed and why we fail.

Once we understand those things we need to determine what skills and resources are needed to be effective in our roles. As part of that, we need to understand what happens if we continue to fail. It’s easy to talk about the costs of services, but we need to fully comprehend the costs of not having those services before making any decisions.

“ YES!!! I was so happy to be able to come yesterday. As a student it was wonderful to be invited to the conversation and to hear about how we can work together so we are not working against each other.

-Emma Bickley

