



Social workers in schools: Relationship, location and process



**EDUCATION AND
SOCIAL WORK**

Changing
environment

Focus on
children



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Change



Restock report

New legislation

Research vital



Cover design: expert Panel final report

1. Background
& study

2. Look at
our profile

4. What
next?

AIMS

3. Explore
some
themes



Vulnerable Children Act 2014



- The VCA (2014) positions teachers as key professionals in a **collaborative response** to child maltreatment.
- Increased emphasis on a wide group of professionals, including teachers, to take a role in **noticing and responding** to child maltreatment
- Currently school policies focus on principals and others with pastoral responsibility

Research question and aim



- What does this potential heightened emphasis on their role in child protection mean for primary and intermediate school teachers and, in particular, for their preparation for professional practice?
- The project will gather the views of school principals, and also of **registered social workers with experience of working in schools**, with regard to the teaching profession's increasing role in noticing and addressing child maltreatment and in concomitant collaborative work with other professionals.
- It will also ascertain the extent to which final year ITE students feel prepared to take up this role.

The study: 3 phases

- Interview with SWiS (20) today's presentation
- Interviews with school principals (16)
- Focus groups with final year initial teacher education students (TBC)



Profile of participants



- NZ European (11), Maori (5) Other E.(4)
- Female (15) Male (5)
- Age 31-40 = 4
- Age 41-50= 8
- Age 51+ = 8
- All SW quals and all registered (4 provisional)

The literature: marginalisation ?

- ‘They have served as counselors, mediators, and advocates. Traditionally, school social workers have been primary facilitators of communication and linkage between school, home, and community. Yet, despite having such vast and critical responsibility within learning systems, school social workers remain marginalized and discounted as school leaders’.
- (Sherman, 2016, p.1)

The literature: educational logic?

‘School social workers can be seen as a professional group operating on the margin of an educational logic that dominates schools as institutions’.

(Isaksson & Sjöström, 2016,p.1.)

The literature: human rights approach

- ‘School social workers are a group of professionals whose ethical mission is to intervene where these types of social injustices exist and to provide an opportunity for all children to optimize their educational potential’.

(Allan-Meares & Montgomery, 2014, p.109)

What we asked



- How well prepared did you feel you were to work in a school environment?
- What (if anything) did you feel you lacked - knowledge, skills, confidence – or all of those?
- How did you get support for yourself if there were gaps?
- What do you think are the essential aspects of training/ preparation for work as a social worker with children in a school setting?
- What are the strengths and challenges of practising social work in a school setting?
- Plus a section we are not reporting today...

Preparedness



- Probably felt a bit overwhelming at first because you know the social work role in what you need to do, but you also need to have a really good understanding of education and how schools work. It is almost like you need kind of two sets of preparation really.
- Oh they had been doing without us for so long so they felt that, you know, what can we do differently and better...That is what I picked up.
- I mean I just thought...I could go in there and I wasn't being cocky but I thought I had the stuff and I realised very soon oh my gosh ...I had to really draw out things like you are building the relationship between each person within the school that I was having to deal with

Skills



- Yeah the first very important skill was honing in on my relationship skills, building relationships with teachers -with a set of professionals that had a different focus viewpoint [to mine]

Relationship building... in every interview

Gaps



- No I don't think SWISies need more training. I think that principals getting on board more. There needs to be more communication not just from the NGO providing service but from the Ministry of Education.
- I think the expectation of going in and getting straight into the schools and receiving referrals is quite naïve. It can take a good two, three terms until that trust is formed by teachers, by principals, by public health nurses.

Support



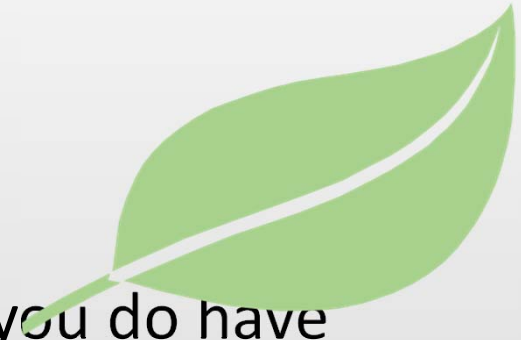
- having at the bare minimum maybe a senior practitioner who can mentor you for, you know, a three month period. Not necessarily, you know, every day but just having a really good mentor that knows their role and understands it really well, you know, kind of your personal mentor really
- we have peer supervision every three weeks, we have external supervision, we have internal supervision, you know, regularly and then we have got our meetings every week and so we are always sharing stuff so you hear it, you know, the struggles that they go through

Essential training needs



- understanding the way that our New Zealand education system operates is most important. Being very staunch and very clear in the tools that we come with as social workers, but being able to be quite flexible and intertwine what we bring into the school... and most definitely always what is most challenging is building the relationship.

Strengths



- I would say the strength is the fact that you do have these close bonds with your family because they see you there every day and they know that they can come and talk to and you are not a CYF social worker. You are a social worker working for [agency] and you are sitting in a school environment. So it is easier to come in and see you and it is easier for the children.
- I think you get to know the children really well and establish a sense of trust with them which is really lovely. Strength – getting to know children really well

Challenges



It is an unusual environment to work because in many regards you are a guest within the environment ...You are juggling and jumping between making sure that the children's educational needs are met as well as by ensuring you don't remove a child to work with a child from the classroom at key times that are going to interfere with their education as well.

Social work and education are two very different areas and although they both work with children and parents and learning and growth I find that they come from a different perspective ...you need to be really aware of that when working with school setting...you also really need to be able to make that translation to see things from an education perspective [as well]

Other things we heard....

So I had to develop this attitude well hang on I've got a degree and I'm specialised in this area you cannot do that.....

I didn't like taking that attitude but I had to because I thought well hang on you're a principal, you are a teacher ...you know, you do your best but you are not trained to have that understanding and I found that really beneficial to me because I knew stuff and sometimes I would sit back and just let them talk, talk, talk, talk, and come up with solutions themselves and then suddenly one day it was like 'oh [name] what do you think?'

Clarity about social work role

- I don't think they understood fully what they wanted from me and how it was going to work and I don't think they fully understood social work and, you know, best practice for us and how we kind of work.



Principal variability in a nutshell



- So some of the challenges yeah were principals who **didn't see** concern around children safety and neglect through to some people **over zealous** through to someone who worked around those issues and had got a **really good engagement** with families around them. Families knew there was concerns, he knew what he was doing, they felt able to communicate with him around it.

Capturing the craziness....

- As well as those therapeutic interventions with the child and the family ...often it is the **therapeutic intervention with the school in reality**. You've got the school to feel good about what they are doing and enabled and empowered to provide that care for the child and for the family... as well as doing all the other day to day things that schools do around, you know, learning and systems and timetables and the craziness.



Power

Conflict

Relationships

Process

Location

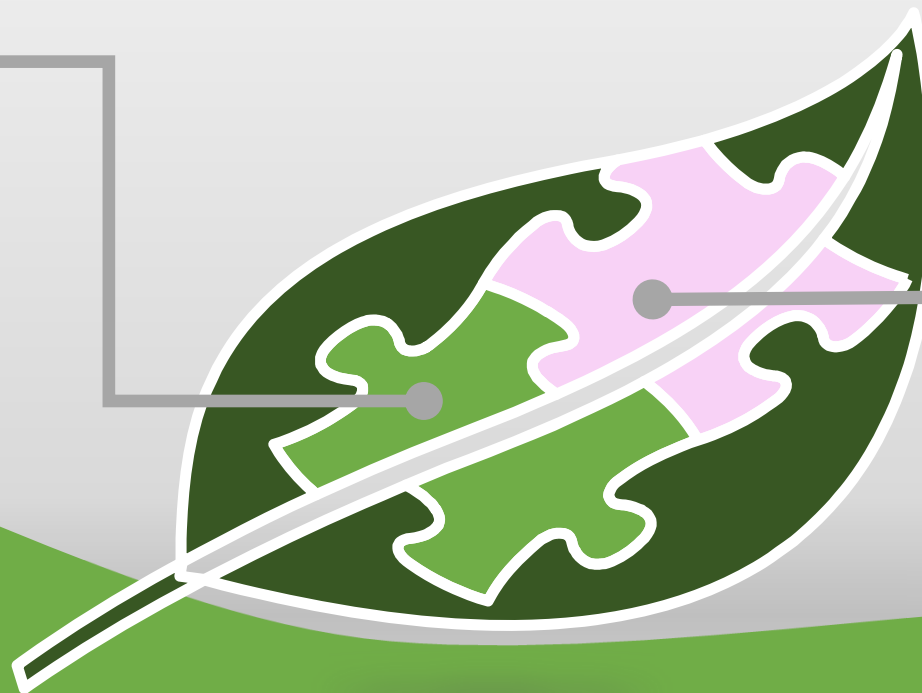
Roles

Complete all the phases

Undertake the analysis

Reporting to stakeholders

Extend the study to health



Where to next ?



Research needs?

Scope of
practice?

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