



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

Information Centre

Te Pūnaha Whakamāhāhiatanga

PRESERVATION

DRAFT

CHILD YOUTH AND FAMILY NATIONAL CALL CENTRE

**The needs of professionals who notify child abuse and neglect
to the Department**

A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Social Work (Applied) degree
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ABSTRACT

Call Centres are a relatively new phenomenon, and in social services, an even more recent development. The Child Youth and Family Call Centre opened in late October 1997 as an Auckland Metropolitan Service, it began expansion to a nationwide service in 2000. The Call Centre was established to standardise telephone services and improve access to intake services, thus improving the Departments relationships with external stakeholders in the child welfare sector. Apart from the original research about establishing the Call Centre, little information is available about whether this method of delivering intake services is meeting the needs of professionals and external stakeholders.

This research project looked at the needs of Professionals who notify the Department of Child Youth and Family Service National Call Centre of child abuse and neglect. In particular it explored what is of value to professionals and the features of a quality service as defined by notifiers. It explored themes around timeliness of response from the Call Centre, knowledge of local areas and the differing needs of notifiers in rural, provincial and urban settings. Five categories of notifiers were used; schools, health, Maori or Iwi Service providers, Community service providers, and Police.

Nearly all participants of the study expressed a preference to make referrals to local CYF site offices, to someone who knew the notifier, the area and the families despite several complaints about the after hours intake/emergency service currently provided by sites and concerns about the service they received when sites managed intake services. In contrast, the majority of respondents were positive about the service they received from the Call Centre and enjoyed the benefits of an instant response to enquiries and notifications. They also noted the professionalism of Call Centre staff and appreciated the separation of response decisions from resourcing. Communities that have strong relationships with local CYF staff, appeared to view the Call Centre much more positively than those working in communities where the site had high unallocated lists and a poor relationship with the community. Many of the concerns expressed about the Call Centre were in fact about unallocated lists and the problems that result. Further evaluations of the Call Centre will need to take this factor into account.

PRESERVATION

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Lest anyone be confused, all mistakes contained within are entirely of my own making and owe nothing to the support and encouragement I have received from many quarters. My gratitude goes to my family, particularly my parents who had the foresight to support me through my continuing education and encouraged me to strive to always improve myself and the world around me. To my partner, Colette, who has been uncomplaining and supportive and has read and commented on this whilst she had many other better things to do. To my employers – particularly John Drew, without whose enthusiastic support I would have struggled much more than I did, and to Shona Flood who will not want to be named but without her help I would not have been able to complete this project. To Liz, for reading and commenting constructively on several drafts. I also have my friends and team to thank, for their forbearance in my absence and whom I have sorely missed. Finally to my course controller, Neil Lunt, who stayed calm when I was not.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Call centres are a relatively new phenomenon. The first models began appearing in the 1970s. However changes to the telecommunication industry meant that call centres grew exponentially in the 1990s. Now all major industries and increasingly government agencies and local bodies run call centres as an integral part of their customer service management. Initially call centres appeared in the commercial sector, such as banking and insurance industries, then in the utility sector and in medium sized businesses. Now more recently some are developing in the social service sector, child protection services appears to be an even more recent development.

Evaluations of call centres, until recently have primarily focussed on quantitative measurement of variables such as average speed of answer, abandonment rates and numbers of calls taken. While this is not the operating and evaluation model of the Child, Youth and Family Call Centre, there are numerous issues that arise out of the utilisation of call centres in a social service setting when assessing quality. Almost all existing or published research focuses on the private or business sector, and is interested in management practices and evaluation of effectiveness and suitability of design of call centres for commercial purposes.

The Child Youth and Family National Call Centre

The Call Centre is based in Grey Lynn, Auckland and is accessed by a nationwide toll free number, 0508 FAMILY (326 459). The Call Centre is a two-tier system and initially provides a telephone reception service for all Child Youth and Family site offices with the exception of national office, residences and some specialist services and video units.

The Telephone Service Operators (TSO's) transfer calls to workers throughout the sites and provide some screening or pass calls to the second tier of professional social workers to take notifications or field enquiries about child abuse related matters.

The second tier of intake social workers provides telephone, fax, mail and email intake and enquiry services for care and protection to New Zealand currently, with the exception of ten sites. The rollout process for the remaining areas is planned to take place early to mid 2002. The remaining sites manage their own telephone intake by rostered or permanent duty social workers based in individual site offices. Intake social workers based at the Call Centre are only able to assist with calls relating to enquiries and new notifications and do not contribute as a rule to existing cases or investigations. Coverage is currently from 8am – 5pm, Monday to Friday, however extension to a 24 hour 7 day a week operation is being planned for later in 2002 once staffing and other operational issues are resolved. Calls received after 5pm are re-directed to a range of after hours' services according to local arrangements.

Notification/Enquiry Overview

Telephone service operators (TSO's) answer all calls during daytime hours and refer intake or enquiry matters to an intake social worker. When intake social workers take the call their task is to establish whether the caller is making a notification relating the care or protection of a child or young person or an enquiry that needs advice or information. Enquiry matters cover a large range of issues frequently including custody enquiries, the required age of babysitters, child behaviour and parenting issues. If sufficient information is provided in relation to a care or protection matter, a notification or intake is established on the Child Youth and Family computer system. Information includes, the notifiers details, details about the child/ren and their family, incident details or concerns and a history of the family's previous involvement with the service. Further checks may be required to corroborate concerns or to clarify information. The next decision requires

an intake worker to determine the outcome of further or no further action. If further action is required an intake social worker must determine the criticality of the response i.e. requiring same, next day, seven day or 28 day response from the Site. A letter is forwarded to the notifier acknowledging receipt of the notification, and identifying the site following up the intake information. The intake is referred electronically to the Call Centre supervisor for sign off and to the site for follow up. If the matter is critical – a same day response is required, the Site is contacted by telephone immediately.

Research Interest

The research was planned to be of practical use. Statutory social work, and a brief period in residential work, has been my primary employment. Working in a call centre environment and reading the available literature lead me to question the apparent contradictions between what appears to be an unashamedly commercial enterprise and an inherently 'soft' activity like social work. However the strong drive for customer service which appeared to mirror basic social work principles of respect, empowerment and more recently partnership made me curious about whether a concept like a call centre that has the potential to be an impersonal and mechanistic environment could meet the needs of external stakeholders to the Department in providing a service that was relevant and of use to them.

The aim of this exploratory study was to obtain the expressed needs (rather than the perceived needs by the Department) of professional stakeholders. This group makes up to half of the notifications to the Department of Child Youth and Family Services; family, whanau and neighbours make the other half. Apart from the original scoping study for the Call Centre which focussed on Auckland (as it was initially planned to be an Auckland service), little has been done since to assess the needs of those who utilise the service. Although regular monitoring and reporting occurs to assess service levels and call volumes. There is conflicting evidence about the needs of professional notifiers from

previous reports. (CYF, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2001d). However most of the information is anecdotal or based on very small samples or are the perceptions of CYF staff.

The research included 17 telephone interviews of professionals who refer or might be likely to refer children to Child Youth and Family, from five different geographical areas, throughout New Zealand. These came from a range of professionals groups including Police, Schools, Community Groups, Maori service providers and health professionals. Four main themes were explored: issues relating to local knowledge, relationships between professionals and their local sites after the introduction of the call centre, the needs of notifiers in differing geographical regions and knowledge of Maori language and tikanga in a Call Centre environment. This study was planned to be of benefit to the existing call centre and this report will be fed back to the Manager of the Call Centre.

The report is organised as follows. The Child Youth and Family National Call Centre is described, literature is discussed including the previous reports about the National Call Centre. This allows the research questions to emerge, followed by an explanation of the methodology of the study and fieldwork experience. The next section is divided into two parts, firstly a discussion of the findings and secondly analysis of what these might mean, finally the conclusion and some recommendations. There is a glossary at the end of call centre terminology and technical terms.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter provides a closer examination of the Child, Youth and Family Call Centre, and previous research reports. It then explores the development and expansion of the call centre industry and best practice and benchmarking, some of the pitfalls of call centres are examined. The New Zealand experience of call centres is considered along with the development of call centres in local and central government. Customer service expectations are briefly discussed and this leads to the development of the research question.

Child, Youth and Family Call Centre

The Call Centre began as a response to a review of service delivery in the Auckland metropolitan area of Child Youth and Family Services to the Auckland community in 1996. The Auckland Call Centre (eventually to become the National Call Centre) arose out of recognition of issues of workload and staffing difficulties as a result of the client population growth that was not met by a proportionate increase in funding and resources. In addition a number of practice issues were identified in relation to the intake process, such as inconsistent responses to enquiries and notifiers, varying threshold levels and recording of intakes across different offices and inadequate feedback to notifiers. These factors made it difficult to accurately measure workloads and allocate resources. The Metropolitan Project gathered information through analysing the incoming work; interviews with key agencies and stakeholders and community groups; and focus groups with social workers and key staff.

The Call Centre arose out of recognition of these issues and that 90% of new work received by the Department was by telephone in the Metropolitan area. The Call Centre was designed to reduce frontline pressure by reducing field social workers' responsibility for taking enquires and establishing notifications received by telephone. In addition it proposed that more effective customer focussed telephone responses could ensure an integrated and standardised social work intake and response decision-making system. The perceived benefits would be to improve public awareness, and enhance relationships with key stakeholders and partners.

Expansion

Following a positive review of the Call Centre, (Deloitte, 1998), plans were developed to expand the Call Centre nationally. These plans were based on the belief that a single toll free number to Child Youth and Family would be the most effective solution to problems identified in public access. The Call Centre had performed well on the objectives for:

- standardising telephone services
- improving access to intake services and improved relationships with agencies
- achieving consistency in managing intake thresholds
- separating resource issues from response decision making

It was believed that an expanded Call Centre would especially assist people in isolated areas (giving toll free access) and provide a consistent national response to enquiries and intakes. It was also expected to free up frontline social workers to carry out investigations. Finally because of the technology available in the Call Centre, it would enable the Service to collect data nationally about call rates, duration and abandonment rates with confidence that thresholds were applied consistently across the country. Although Christchurch already had an existing office that ran a centralised Intake service

run along similar lines to the Auckland Call Centre, a decision was made to keep one single Call Centre rather than operating out of two sites.

Review of Expansion

Although the Deloitte review of the Auckland Call Centre showed some positive results, (Deloitte, 1998), a Ministerial review of Child Youth and Family in 2000, (Brown, 2001) questioned whether the high number of unallocated cases could be attributed to the introduction of the Call Centre. A small study, as part of the Department's response to the Brown report, indicated more mixed results, (CYF, 2001a). Statistical analysis showed that appeared to be no significant changes in overall notification rates in areas covered by the Call Centre and those covered by traditional duty social workers (CYF, 2001a,b). Essentially the data did not indicate a direct link between the high number of unallocated cases and the Call Centre. This will be reviewed in a future evaluation.

The first CYF study in 2001 raised questions about areas of local knowledge, liaison between sites and the Call Centre and concerns about effects of the Call Centre on maintaining interagency relationships and that the benefits of a Call Centre in a major metropolitan area might not be replicated in a smaller provincial or rural setting. (CYF, 2001a). Due to the short timeframes however this report covered only two small provincial sites covered by the Call Centre. An earlier report on a pilot expansion of the Call Centre into Northland in 1998 did not indicate this. The Northland Report (CYF, 1999) indicated that call centre social workers could not retain local knowledge of all communities covered by an expanded call centre and that this was an acknowledged loss in a call centre environment. However it also noted the importance of having access to a national up to date community resource database.

The introduction of such a national database along with a new client records system in November 2000 has not met expectations and the community resource database has not been maintained. This was noted in a recent Audit report (CYF, 2001d). The audit review was commissioned to ensure the Call Centre was meeting the expected levels of service to sites, and external users. The final report indicated that there are disparate views held about the Call Centre particularly by site staff. Comments relating to community needs were primarily focussed on the confusion that some communities had over the Call Centres role and while there were some negative feelings toward the Call Centre the general feeling was that it has the potential to meet the needs of the Service and of the community. (CYF, 2001d). Whilst both CYF site staff and community stakeholders were interviewed, the report did not distinguish between the separate groups perceptions. The report did suggest that community perceptions of the Call Centre may be influenced by CYF staff perceptions.

Call Centre Literature

There is a growing literature about call centres, mostly written from two opposing perspectives. Call centres are a concept, rather than any one type of workplace, they can be run well or extremely poorly and the literature seems to reflect this division. The first perspective is offered by industry proponents, consultants and commentators and is found in a range of publications about call centres such as marketing, management, Information Technology and human resource and call centre industry related magazines and research reports. This body of literature focuses almost entirely on best practice, what makes an excellent call centre and a management perspective on setting up a call centre and running one. Union commentators and critics of the call centre industry offer an alternative perspective. This literature is probably more widely known and focuses on worst practice and the horror stories associated with the call centre industry. These reports are often found in Occupational Health and Safety Magazines and Journals, newspapers, union publications and websites. There is a small but growing academic literature primarily located in Sociological and Geographical studies and Management

Journals, however Call Centres are primarily a vacuum for academic research both nationally and internationally and in relation to social or human service literature, there is very little published material.

Call Centre Technology

Call centres are a fledgling industry, their origins are recent and are a result of technological advancement and reducing costs in the telecommunication industry. Call centres emerged in the 1970's as a generalised call response system, (O'Neil, 1998). However the high price of the associated technology meant that few organisations could afford call centres until the 1990's when the cost of integrating Information Technology ('IT') with telephone systems became affordable. Free phone services were introduced to New Zealand in 1989 with the use of '0800' numbers. Coupled with the reducing costs of toll calls, and changed pricing structure (from charging a minimum of three minutes per call to charging per minute) and having access to direct dialled toll calls enabled call centres to take advantage of technology and grow. Employment practice shifted from having individual clerks or teams behind the scenes, separated into different departments or sections to having generalist customer service officers or combined marketing, sales and supply departments providing immediate responses rather than transferring calls through different departments. A call centre is now a workplace where a group of telephone agents are (usually) located in the same room or building, who answer telephone calls and deliver services remotely, often supported by sophisticated information and communication technology systems using a pooling process such as 'ACD' Automatic Call Distribution. Call centres can vary in size from a few to several hundred agents. The burgeoning use of faxes and the Internet to provide services means that call centres are becoming contact centres, however for the purposes of this research I have focussed on call centres.

Establishing a Call Centre

The primary reasons for setting up call centres are varied depending on the industry and type of call centre. Call centres are seldom set up solely to handle telephone calls better and in greater numbers. They are often developed as a result of a fundamental review of the way an organisation approaches service deliver (FITLOG, 1998), as was the case with the Auckland Metropolitan Call Centre in response to the Metropolitan Review. There are two major types of call centres, inbound and outbound and of course call centres that combine both these functions. Many commentators claim that all major industries now have call centres and the next major area of growth for call centres is in the small to mid size business, (Tapsell, 1998), (Weston, 2001). The TARP (Technical Assistance Research Programs) benchmarking project divides the industry into four categories for the purpose of producing comparable research. The studies are divided into customer care, telemarketing, credit and collection and interactive voice response systems. For the purpose of this research project I have focussed on customer care call centres, as this most closely aligns with the Department's call centre framework. The basic objectives of setting up a call centre will however be the same: the idea of reducing the workload within the organisation and enabling specialised staff to concentrate on high priority work, speeding up the service to customers and keeping existing customers and increasing the volume of work. (Moore, 2000).

Best Practice and Benchmarking

The divide in the literature between the best and worst practices of call centres is indicative of the industry's infancy. The public perception or stereotype of call centres being a "big brother meets Charles Dickens world of battery (hens) and electronic surveillance" (Lewis, 2000 p.32) is in part true, although increasingly this type of call centre is becoming more scarce. Increasing awareness of the importance of quality outcomes as the field becomes increasingly sophisticated may have had an impact on this development. Initially call centre technology enabled managers to measure and quantify

performance and outputs to a degree not previously known in clerical positions. Measures such as grade of service, 'GOS', were slavishly adhered to. This is usually set at 80/20, which means 80% of all incoming calls are answered within 20 seconds. This benchmark was established in the 1940s by an American telephone company as an appropriate level of service and has been carried through to today's call centre environment. Other aspects that can be measured are call volumes, average call length and abandonment rates. Early call centres and Benchmarking reports e.g. TARP, focussed on these measures to the exclusion of all else. In addition call centres arose during a period of intense cost cutting within the private and public sector, where the focus was primarily on outputs for the lowest cost not on outcomes. Recent studies, (ACA Research, 1998), (TARP, 1997), indicate that the main reasons call centres fail, are that benchmarks are not focussed on outcomes. IT measurements focussed on galley slave mentality and the call centre's purpose were not aligned with the organisational purpose and had failed to measure customer satisfaction. The TARP 1997 benchmarking report made a significant departure from the previous reports it had produced on call centres and shifted the focus from quantity to quality, from outputs to outcomes and from an IT driven mode of measurement to a more balanced definition of quality which acknowledged the most valuable resource in call centres – the human resources. This change is also reflected in the change of the Department's strategic direction of 'New Directions' where the focus on quality outcomes and long term change for families, rather than quantity of outputs and short term interventions.

Call Centre Growth

Various studies and commentators have attempted to estimate the number of call centres and people employed in the industry and to estimate the growth. Most of this data is generated by the research reports that are conducted by industry researchers, e.g. TARP, CCR (Call Centre Research), ACA Research. These reports are produced in cooperation with members of the industry, the research is sponsored by major companies such as Telecom and Telstra, two of the 11 sponsors for the 1997 TARP report. CCR estimated

that there were 300 call centres in New Zealand employing 15 000 people in New Zealand. The majority located in the main centres and cater for regional or national customers (CCR, 1999). A smaller proportion – 10% - caters for international markets, mainly Australia. A more recent estimate by ACA research cited in (Weston, 2001) estimates that 2.1% of the labour force is employed in the call centre industry amounting to 40 000 employees. Call centres are reported to be growing at a rate of 15% per annum in New Zealand, which is a similar rate to Australia.

Globally there are an estimated 150 000 call centres increasing at a rate of 17% per annum (Infotech, 1999). The reported exponential growth of call centres internationally is attributed to the new way of decentralising office work and an international division of labour, where workers in a low wage environment service the activities of firms in other countries (Huws et al, 1999). Already call centres in the airline and telco (telecommunications) industries have laid off large numbers of staff and closed call centres. Industry commentators indicate that call centre growth is likely to flatten and may be contracting (Callcentre.net, 2001).

The New Zealand Experience

New Zealand's government response to the growth in the call centre industry was spearheaded by the TRADENZ announcement of the Call Centre Attraction Initiative in July 1999. A partnership approach was launched with the call centre industry to attract international call centres to New Zealand. It identified advantages of locating call centres in New Zealand, such as the low payroll tax, favourable exchange rates, time zone advantages and low relative costs of locating a call centre in New Zealand. There has been some criticism of this approach, (Larner, 2000), (New Zealand Herald, 1999), and fears that modern day sweatshops would be developed as a result of this initiative and that capitalising on low wages and cost cutting was not beneficial to New Zealand employees (Farr, 1999). Larner (2001) notes that wages are already low in the call centre

industry. The average full time equivalent (FTE) wage in New Zealand is \$34 840 per annum and recent surveys of remuneration in call centres show the average wage is \$28 000 – \$33 000 per annum if bonuses and incentives are included.

Local and Central Government

There is very little literature relating to the use of call centres in government. However the recent report on issues in the relationship between the New Zealand State and Iwi/Maori, community and voluntary organisations noted that one of the problems in the relationship between the community sector and government agencies was the sense of exclusion people from community and voluntary sector organisations felt from decision making processes and the difficulties encountered in making contact with government officials. The report notes the use of ‘inhuman’ phone systems as a major frustration and the need for a timely follow up of messages and the ability to speak directly with a ‘real person’ when matters were complex or urgent. (Community and Voluntary Sector Working Party, 2001)

Call centres work for two reasons for the government. They provide substantial productivity gains and improved customer satisfaction. (Horrocks, 1998). They are also likely to create substantial cost savings through centralisation of services, however call centres are also expensive to run and are considered to be ‘cost centres’ for organisations as 75% of the cost is labour. Estimates of the cost of customer contact by call centre ranges from \$4 - \$8, whereas maintaining the same level of service at branches costs \$25 - \$50. (ACA Research, 1997). As public expectations are raised by services received in the private sector with increased access to banking, insurance, help desks, 24 hours, seven days a week, poor customer service in the government sector is thrown into sharp relief. A recent report of the Controller and Auditor General (1999) noted that customer service had not always received the priority it needed in the public sector, bearing in mind the particular responsibility the public sector has to its clients who usually do not

have the choice of using another service. Additionally the public sector has had to cope with an ever-decreasing resource, (Duncan and Worrall, 2000), (Brown, 2000).

Best practice for achieving customer service in the public sector was prescribed in the Auditor Generals report (1999) as ensuring reliability or continuous service, ensuring that clients were aware of their obligations, and making provision for respect and privacy of confidential information. In addition public sector agencies needed to ensure that they developed a client centred service that adapted to the specific needs of clients and that the agency was backed by sufficient resources (including staffing) to ensure quality outcomes. The report covered all aspects of customer service and studied three government call centres in detail. It concluded that call centres made a valuable contribution to the quality that clients received.

Labour Issues

Labour force issues are conceptualised as problems attracting and retaining quality employees, not as an industry that pays low wages, has poor work place conditions or unfulfilling jobs and little in depth analysis of the high churn (turnover) rates. (Larner, 2000). Unions have acknowledged that call centres have proved a difficult environment to break into. (Lewis, 2000). There are a plethora of reasons, including unions' slow adaptation to the demands of the new working environments, the high number of part time, casual and young workers in the industry and large numbers of professionals. There are well reported comments by critics about the difficulty that some employees have in working in call centres, including the lack of regulation and potential for monitoring nearly every minute of the day, key stroke and telephone call. However, some commentators dispute some of the claims made in the literature, (Wheeler, 2000), (Lankshear et al, 2001). In a study of workplace monitoring where company policy was that calls be regularly recorded and monitored for appraisal and quality assurance, it appeared that there was a far less monitoring than what management claimed and the

researchers observed. (Lankshear et al, 2000). However other commentators, (Farr, 1999), (Izzard, 1998) cite that monitoring and highly pressurised environments is one of the key sources of stress in a call centre environment, which is reflected in the high turnover rates commonly reported in call centres. Inbound call centres in the Australasian region are reported to have a turnover of 26% per annum for full time staff and 33% for part time. (Callcentre.news, 2001). However there are reports that turnover is lower in New Zealand at 20% on average whereas Australia averages 30% per annum. (Infotech, 2001). Anecdotal reports suggest that turnover in Government and local government call centres are lower than the private sector.

Customer Satisfaction

Very little has been reported about customer satisfaction with the delivery of services through call centres, even though they have been in existence for over two decades. Whilst there are some major advantages to customers using call centres, such as increased convenience, shorter times needed for each transaction, and faster service due to new technologies. There are also disadvantages of call centres, although perceived service quality of call centre contact is reported as higher by some than face to face contact particularly in the human services context. (Driver and Johnston, cited in Bennington, Cummane, & Conn, 1998: 163). However some cultures may not always accept call centre technologies, although a high take-up rate of mobile telephone and internet technologies might be an indicator that this is not a significant issue in New Zealand. Reliability is an important indicator of customer satisfaction as is user friendliness. Issues and timeliness and responsiveness are especially relevant to call centres. Long waiting times for a call to be answered greatly affects perceptions of service quality and increases frustrations of callers. There are several reasons for this: unoccupied time feels longer than occupied time; uncertainty about the length of wait feels longer than finite waiting; unexplained waits are longer than explained waits, unfair waits are longer than equitable waits; and the more valuable the service the longer the customer will wait Zeithaml and Bitner cited in (Bennington, Cummane, & Conn, 1998: 163).

Research conducted in Australia of Centrelink, a major human services call centre operation, indicated that 60% of their customers preferred to deal with the service in person rather than by telephone. (Centrelink cited in Bennington, Cummane, & Conn, 1998: 164). There are many cues missed by the telephone-only contact and difficulties in establishing relationships, which are particularly necessary for social services (Crome, 1998). Therefore negativity about technologically based services is likely to increase where a high degree of personal attention and relationship is required, however this may not be consistent across all groups.

The Research Question

Whilst considerable attention has been paid to the Child, Youth and Family Call Centre and whether it is meeting its' operational requirements, service levels and Departmental objectives, little attention has been accorded to customer satisfaction with a call centre mode of interaction. Additionally very little is known about what attributes of a call centre are valued and what contributes to perceptions of poor customer service. It is clear that call centres are not monolithic institutions. The division in the literature indicates the infancy of the industry and paucity of information and analysis of the wider issues surrounding call centres particularly in relation to customer service. It is too simplistic to assume that call centres are all good or all bad, however what is certain is that call centres have expanded exponentially, that they are undergoing a change of philosophy and moving from output to outcome measurement. Awareness is increasing of the pitfalls of call centres for workers and that there is a complex negotiation and interaction that occurs between all of the features that constitute a call centre. The question that arises in these paradoxes is what is, and is not of value to professionals who notify Child, Youth and Family about child abuse and neglect in a call centre environment.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The Emergence of the Research Topic

This research arose out of a desire to obtain some clarity about what professionals value when making referrals to the Department. A number of reports and reviews produced in the Department provided disparate views about the Call Centre. Primarily these reports have focussed on the views of Site staff and their anecdotal reports of community and professional views (Brown 2000), (CYF, 2001a). However other impact evaluation reports (CYF, 1998), (CYF, 2001b) and internally conducted evaluations have reported contrasting information: that the Call Centre was meeting its obligations to the community and Departmental service levels. Views of the Call Centre polarised from being the best to the worst thing that Child, Youth and Family had initiated. These views also reflect views that I held as a field practitioner. I am aware of the importance of developing and maintaining relationships with professionals and agencies in the field and necessity of working collaboratively, having now worked in the Call Centre – I am aware of positive feedback from professionals and agencies that was often not heard of when working in the front line care and protection. The approach that I chose was an effort to understand the meaning behind these contradictory views held by CYF staff, external stakeholders, research reports, my own views and those of colleagues and to obtain some data that would contribute to improving services where gaps were identified, whether that was at the Call Centre or within the Service as a whole.

Evaluation Approach

Evaluation is central to understanding how things can be done better. An open enquiry framework can free up more positive frames of mind to new solutions that are normally devoted to solving immediate and pressing problems (Wadsworth, 1997). It can also increase the chances of identifying areas for improvement by exploring problems in depth

and prioritising what is important, significant and of value to stakeholders. It can assist with innovation and creativity by suspending judgment about solutions. However there are also weaknesses in this approach that can involve overlooking important matters that are not yet identified and as the approach is not systematic and comprehensive it can lead to uncertainty and disagreement and lack of clarity about the reasons why.

An audit review of implementation was being conducted at the same time as this research project to examine whether the Call Centre was meeting its performance standards, whether it was operating efficiently and managing the technical risks associated with call centres (CYF, 2001d). Audit reviews look at broader matters within existing frameworks and are likely to be more comprehensive and identify gaps within existing services, however they do not discriminate what are valuable and current issues. They also do not usually identify how to change or improve situations or examine why implementation has not occurred. Solutions are usually found within the status quo (Wadsworth, 1997). By considering these two projects in tandem the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches could be seen to complement one another, rather than taking an either/or approach. In addition, Child, Youth and Family National Office is in the process of contracting a larger impact evaluation project, primarily as a response to the recent ministerial review. This project is aimed at addressing whether there are problems in the delivery of services. In particular it is planned to address the question that has repeatedly arisen about the impact of the Call Centre on the relationship between sites and local communities, especially in light of the focus of the strengths-based model of practice being introduced to the Department and the focus on local networks and client centred practice.

Research Methodology

This research has used qualitative methods in order to explore participants' needs and the value that they assign to these. Qualitative research methodology is especially useful when the research focuses on issues where the researcher has some knowledge about which questions need to be answered, the participants, processes and procedures (Sarantakos, 1993), (Tolich and Davidson, 1999). It is based on principles of openness and exploration and the process of qualitative research is often based on a reciprocal communication between the researcher and the participant. It is also in line with the shift in analysis of call centres from purely quantitative reviews to more qualitative evaluations of the impacts of call centres on client groups, staff and quality (Infotech, 1999). The research is based on the premise that reality is socially constructed rather than objectively quantifiable from numerical data and statistical analysis. It endeavoured to give shape to the interactions between professional notifiers and the Department and to identify their needs. Whilst an exploratory study, generalisation from qualitative research is possible when samples can act as typical representatives of a group, and findings can be interpreted beyond the group studies and are examples of 'exemplar' or 'analytic' generalisations (Sarantakos, 1993).

The primary research method engaged in this project is the semi-standardised interview carried out individually (See Appendix 7). Whilst the interview questions were scripted initially, they were designed as open questions where wording could be changed to meet the needs of the participant and the goals of the research. This enabled a degree of flexibility and allowed for a higher response rate for all of the subject areas and the opportunity to discuss participation. In light of the subject of the study, call centres, where there is often misunderstanding and preconceptions, an interview provided a forum where misunderstandings could be corrected and the context clarified.

There are potential also drawbacks of researching areas where one is over familiar, where it can become difficult to comprehend issues that are normally taken for granted. Although involvement in the field one is researching is increasingly common, it is a constant dilemma for the researcher (Tolich and Davidson, 1999). Whilst qualitative research fundamentally rejects the notion of objectivity and involvement in the research is encouraged (Sarantakos, 1993), openness on the part of the researcher is required to ameliorate the potential over-involvement in the research process and to make clear the standpoint, which the researcher comes from this was made clear in the letter to participants and Information Sheet (See Appendix 3 and 6). It is also important to suspend explanations for events and issues in order for something to be seen in a new light. It was necessary for me in the role of researcher to suspend problem-solving processes that I normally engage in when in my role as an employee and supervisor. Stepping out of the role into the role of the researcher, necessitated creating some distance and on the recommendation of the Massey Human Ethics Committee, I prepared a process for dealing with complaints should they arise.

Ethical Issues

This research project was subject to approval of two ethical committees, Massey University Human Ethics Committee, Albany Campus and the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, Research Access Committee. (See Appendix 1 and 2). A penultimate draft of the research report was submitted and reviewed by the Research Access Committee prior to submission to Massey University.

Confidentiality and Informed Consent

Confidentiality of data and protection of participants' identity is particularly significant because of the small size of the country New Zealand ought to be thought of as a small town (Tolich and Davidson, 1999). Confidentiality of participants' identity has been

maintained by not attributing data to particular areas or agencies. However occupational groups have been used. Where verbatim quotes are used, permission has been sought and obtained from the participants but not attributed directly to them. The participants sought for this project were likely to be busy professionals whose time is valuable; their needs were accounted for through a variety of measures. Participation was voluntary, with the option of passing on the invitation to participate to a second or third party (see Appendix 3 and 6). Consent was obtained before proceeding with interviews and participants were informed in the Information Sheet about their right to withdraw at any stage. The interviews were designed to take up to half an hour in individual interviews. Although group interviews were offered, none actually occurred. Participants were informed of the time needed prior to the interview and only one ran over time. Participants were informed of the potential usage of the information obtained through the research and that it would be likely to result in feedback to the National Call Centre to improve services.

Design and Instrumentation

An interview format for conducting the research was chosen for a number of reasons. An interview format allows for everyday behaviour to be examined in a systematic and rigorous way. As a method it is flexible allowing for learning and observations to improve the type of questions as each interview is conducted. (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). As I was aware from previous reports that a wide divergence of views was likely to emerge I wanted to be able to develop themes and understandings as I came to gather more data. Previously a questionnaire was used to obtain feedback from professionals in the Northland pilot evaluation. A number of issues with this: Firstly some respondents were not entirely clear about the distinction between the Site and the Call Centre process and commented on issues of concern to them, however they were unrelated to the Call Centre's role or function. Secondly respondents were unclear about certain Call Centre processes or were unable to distinguish between the telephony and intake functions.

Clearly explanations and clarification of information would have enabled a higher response rate.

A semi-structured interview format was developed around a number of themes that had arisen out of previous reports and audits on the Call Centre and anecdotal reports from social workers, Community Liaison Social Workers and discussions with key informants from the Department. There were several types of questions: – open, without response categories based on a series of themes; some using time contrasts and before and after questions. Closed questions were used to obtain simple data such as whether professionals had made notifications and how many. Ranking questions were used to identify importance of a small number of themes.

Designing the Questions

Questions were based around four main areas:

- Perceived value of the Call Centre, including both telephony and intake social work functions.
- The value of Intake social workers having local knowledge
- Impact of the Call Centre on relationships with local Site staff
- Comparisons between Intakes received at the Call Centre and those previously received at Site.

Ideally the interviews could have been conducted face to face, however in order to meet time and budgetary constraints, interviews were conducted by telephone. A key part of evaluation is adapting the research methods to suit the context, timeframe and the resources. While telephone interviews miss non-verbal cues and allow only for simple questions, it also used the main method of communication that professionals were using

with the Call Centre – the telephone. I was conscious of the needs of the respondents, who were in all likelihood busy professionals with numerous constraints on their time. A further constraint was that the Call Centre serviced most of New Zealand and it was simply impractical to travel all over the country even if the sample was limited. In order to address regional variations and the potential differing needs of professional notifiers in urban, rural and provincial settings, a wide coverage was needed. Given these restrictions, the research is best considered as a scoping study.

Sample

A reliable dependable sample is crucial for the research process. A recent study of the impact of the National Call Centre on site offices unallocated cases, concluded that there were significant weaknesses in the National Call Centre's ability to meet the needs of local knowledge and that it was having a detrimental impact on the maintenance of local interagency relationships (CYF, 2001a). However the report was based on four Sites, two small provincial sites covered by the Call Centre both for less than six months, one metropolitan site and one large provincial site undertaking their own intake work. Reports of community dissatisfaction were anecdotal and reported by Site staff. A more recent Audit review of the Call Centre did not separate out or quantify comments made by community stakeholders in 15 of the sites and communities it visited. Both these reports have attempted to obtain information about community perceptions but has either not clarified whose perceptions are reported or have reported on CYF staff perceptions of professionals needs. In light of this information it seemed appropriate to approach the source and ascertain community and professional feedback directly.

Concerns raised about the generalisability of the Call Centre from an urban to a rural setting were also raised in the Call Centre impact report (CYF, 2001a). Hence a purposeful sample was selected to cover a range of issues. Firstly, a range of geographical areas was chosen to cover urban, rural and provincial centres including both

North and South Island Sites. Five localities were chosen in all: Whangarei, Hamilton, Levin/Horowhenua, Rangiora and Christchurch. I also wanted to include areas that had been covered by the Call Centre for a period in excess of six months to enable initial teething problems to be resolved, and areas where Site staff had supported and opposed the introduction of the Call Centre. Whilst not able to totally exclude areas that had already been approached by Audit, through liaison with Audit staff I was able to avoid contacting any agency already approached to avoid research fatigue. Narrowing the group of potential respondents also meant excluding family members, as the method of contacting and obtaining permission to interview this group would involve a different and more direct approach with immediate follow up of notifications. Family members usually account for approximately 25% of all notifications – although this varies between rural (usually higher) and urban settings.

Several discussions were held with the Manager of the National Call Centre and with the National Manager Service Delivery Support, who is responsible for the Call Centre at Child Youth and Family National Office, to clarify areas that were already covered through the audit review and for the proposed evaluation. Previous reports, reviews, Handbooks and correspondence were also reviewed to clarify and exclude areas and issues already well covered.

Five general categories of notifiers were used after reviewing statistical reports of notifications for the areas chosen:-

- Schools, primary and secondary
- Health, including hospitals, Public Health Nurses, excluding General Practitioners
- Maori Service Providers or Iwi Social Services
- General community service providers e.g. Counselling agencies
- Police, including Youth Aid officers and Child Abuse Teams.

Agencies were identified by using Community directories and telephone books. Potential contacts were also sought through making contact with a Community Liaison Social Worker (Child Youth and Family) or experienced social worker/supervisor to ensure that groups were current or whether there were any local issues or protocols needing to be observed. Two of the geographical areas chosen initially were changed as I discovered Audit had recently visited those areas. After choosing the agencies from directories, I then contacted each by telephone to confirm postal details and to obtain a contact person, usually a team leader or manager, to send invitations to participate in the study. This process uncovered a number of agencies that had closed or were not suitable to the study i.e. dealt with adult populations and was unlikely to refer. Alternative agencies were then located and contacted. The numbers of respondents from each group is included in the table below.

Table 1.

Characteristics of Sample

	<i>School</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>Mhor/Asi</i>	<i>Police</i>	<i>Total</i>
Rural	5		2	2	9
Urban	2	1		1	4
Provincial	1	1	1	1	4
Total	8	2	3	4	17

Fieldwork Process

A letter of support was obtained from Child Youth and Family to introduce the project and indicate the Department was aware of and endorsed the project. (See Appendix 5). This was enclosed with a letter, information sheet and consent form (and self addressed and stamped envelope) and sent to 29 agencies, six to each area with the exception of one, where five were sent as insufficient agencies could be identified. A follow up telephone call was made to ensure receipt of the letter and 19 respondents indicated

willingness to be interviewed. Some of these were people to whom the letter had been passed on. The initial interviews provided valuable feedback for the order of questions and difficulties distinguishing between the Call Centre telephony function and intake social work function. As expected there were difficulties distinguishing between the role of the Call Centre and the Site. The order of questions was changed to focus on the telephony functions towards the end as it appeared to be a lesser-known functionality. All participants gave permission to record their interviews and the recording equipment worked admirably. Some notes were taken concurrently. Interviews were conducted at a prearranged time with participants; Child Youth and Family provided a telephone line where respondents could leave messages that were interested in participating or with questions about the study.

Some participants expressed an interest in responding as a team or a whanau group, where possible arrangements were made to use a speaker telephone by the participants. However what occurred in practice was that participants sought feedback from other team members about the Call Centre and fed back during the interview rather than participating as a group. Permission was sought to use quotes after the interview as appropriate.

A small number of complaints (three) were made about the Call Centre. In discussing the complaint with each participant, I enquired whether these complaints had already been resolved or whether there was a process underway. One complaint was already resolved and two others were in the process of being resolved with the assistance of Site managers or staff advocating on the participants behalf. A respondent raised one other matter as a philosophical opposition to the notion of call centres per se. It would only be resolved by closing the Call Centre altogether and returning to a site based intake process.

Interviews were not transcribed (apart from direct quotes) however data was transferred onto thematic grids and coded. Some codes were developed as a result of key stakeholder interviews and previous research and reviews, others emerged from the interviews. This necessitated revisiting the tapes from time to time to clarify points. I had a larger than anticipated return rate of willing participants, one participant had not used the Call Centre and their responses were limited to hypothesising about their possible needs in relation to making referrals. All the data was used in the analysis and the results of the interviews are discussed in chapter four.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The research explored what was of value to professionals who notify the Department of possible child abuse and neglect. It explored themes that had arisen in previous research around local knowledge; timeliness of response and the differing needs of notifiers in rural, provincial and urban settings. Interviews with participants identified several themes, some of which reinforced previous studies, others contradicted what was already known or suggested by previous research (CYF, 1999), (CYF, 2001a). Whilst the study did not set out to evaluate the implementation of the Call Centre, information was obtained that seemed to indicate that the primary objectives for establishing the Call Centre were mostly met for professionals who notify the Department. The primary objectives were to:

- standardise telephone services
- improve access to intake services
- achieve national consistency in the management of notification intake thresholds
- improve relationships with stakeholders and partners in the child welfare sector
- integrate management and delivery of social work intake services
- relieve pressure on sites to allow frontline social workers greater time to focus on casework.

The last objective has perhaps not been met and is the proposed subject of a larger evaluation project. Pressures from the growing number of unallocated cases has made a large impact on social workers' capability to meet the demand on services from many areas according to notifiers. A previous study (CYF, 2001a), did not find a link between the number of unallocated cases and the Call Centre. It would appear that professionals

who notify the Department would agree that the above objectives have been met however several issues were raised that:-

- Professionals overall preference was to make notifications directly to a local site and to deal with a social worker that was known to them.
- If that option was not available then the majority of respondents were positive about using the Call Centre as long as their relationship with Site remained unaffected.
- Whilst receiving an immediate response (usually) from the Call Centre, some concerns were raised about site's ability to investigate the notification.

There is continued ambivalence about using call centres, although one participant from a provincial centre noted that despite theirs and others philosophical objections to call centres 90% of objections to call centres had ceased in the last six months. Whilst there is an overwhelming preference to make a notification locally, paradoxically the majority of respondents appeared to support or tolerate the current system and found that it had worked well for them.

The Notifiers

Of the 17 responses included in the analysis, nine were from rural areas, four from regional centres and four from urban centres. The highest response was from the South Island with 11 respondents and six from the North Island. The largest category of respondents were schools, with eight responses, followed by the police, with four responses which included both Child Abuse Teams and Youth Aid officers, three respondents were from Maori organisations and two from health organisations. The numbers of referrals that notifiers had made to Child Youth and Family varied considerably, five notifiers had made 2 or fewer notifications or enquiries to the Call Centre in the last year, this included School and Community professionals. The Police

Child Abuse Team officers tended to be the highest referrers, making up to thirty referrals per annum each. Youth Aid Officers made between 9 and 12 referrals per annum. Community organisations also were responsible for making regular referrals of 5 – 10 a year with some agencies referring up to 30 per annum. Of the group that felt negatively towards the Call Centre and had made complaints the high users were disproportionately represented. Only one respondent in this group made less than 30 contacts per annum.

Sensitivity to Local Differences

Nearly all the professionals, with the exception of one, expressed an overall preference for making a notification to their local site office despite a number of comments made about the variability of responses received using a local site based intake system. This included: a perception that site workers were already overloaded and unable to process more work; the difficulty locating a social worker in a position to take a notification and frequently calls were not returned by site staff. The reasons given for a preference to make referrals locally were stable across the occupational groups, urban/rural divide and North and South Islands. The reasons fell into three broad themes: Firstly professionals stated their preference was to speak to an intake social worker locally who knew them, so that they did not have to establish their identity each time as they do in a Call Centre, nor would they have to establish their expertise or reliability as an informant. Some commented that this was a relational issue, where a connection between professionals was a key issue. The two community social workers interviewed in the study both commented that they used Child Youth and Family staff as sounding boards to discuss care and protection issues, either because their own supervisor was not available or did not have sufficient expertise in the area. Having local contacts to make notifications was extremely important for one, however the opposite was true for the second social worker, who was entirely comfortable using the Call Centre for making notifications and enquiries.

The second reason for a local preference was that a larger amount of information had to be made explicit to a social worker based in a remote location as they would not be aware of the particular and localised needs or information about a geographical region, or the implications of particular populations. As one participant stated “(it is) very difficult for someone remote to have good judgment (about risk) without local knowledge”. They went on to add that with close working relationships with sites intervention could be quicker and less formal, however they were relating this to social work practice during the 1980’s when there was more of an emphasis on preventative social work practice. Most of the South Island respondents expressed a preference for a Call Centre based in the South Island.

The third reason related to the inability of social workers based in a Call Centre to know of the family connections or even have personal knowledge of a particular family, this too was seen as a hindrance to making a full and thorough evaluation of all the factors that contribute to making a risk assessment. Professionals tended to use local direct dial numbers to contact local staff to run scenarios and consult with local staff about the need to make a referral.

Views of call centres

Thus we see opposition to call centres in the first instance, however given the existence of the Call Centre. Eight of the respondents were positive about the service that they received and could think of no improvements to be made to the Call Centre. Those who felt most positively about the Call Centre were professionals working in rural areas in both the North and South Islands. In Rangiora and its surrounding districts, all four professionals interviewed stated that they had an excellent working relationship with local Child Youth and Family staff. They also indicated a positive regard for the Call Centre.

Five respondents expressed some ambivalence about the concept of a call centre and perceived some of the benefits of having consistency of service and thresholds, however their overall preference would be to make referrals locally. These respondents came from regional and urban centres. One of the respondents said the Call Centre was like a “never-never land” as it was remote and callers didn’t know where the call was answered. This perhaps lead to the perception that the Call Centre was not always strongly connected with Child, Youth and Family sites. Some thought a referral has fallen into a black hole at the Call Centre when it may have ended up on an unallocated list at a Site.

The third group of four were overwhelmingly negative about the concept and the existence of a National CYF Call Centre. Two of these professionals were based in the Waikato area and two came from Whangarei. Both of these areas have had large unallocated lists in the last year. Three of the four participants were philosophically opposed to Child Youth and Family using a Call Centre concept for accepting notifications and preferred localised services. Three of those who were negative about the Call Centre had either made complaints or had experiences that warranted them. Two complaints were about delays processing faxed referrals and one was about thresholds. However another participant who had also made a complaint about thresholds was also able to name some benefits of using the Call Centre.

Some of the negativity expressed or attributed to the Call Centre was related to delays experienced as a result of unallocated lists at sites. Several respondents felt that the existence of the Call Centre had increased the work for sites, this perhaps is a result of the rapid rise in unallocated cases that coincided with the introduction of the Call Centre in some areas. One of the participants who was opposed to the centralisation of services but acknowledged there were positive aspects about the Call Centre, was concerned about a deterioration in the quality of social work services in the Department as a whole and stated that “we’ve got the social work system that the government has been prepared to

pay for". Another respondent queried the level of funding at sites and the capacity of Child, Youth and Family to manage the work.

" It (the Call Centre) seems like a really good first step, so that there's always somebody available to take people's...urgent concerns and somebody to assess whether they are urgent or non-urgent. It just seems like a bit of a waste of time when you ring in your concerns and they've resourced the Call Centre but they haven't actually resourced a local office to have the ability to follow through."

Twenty Four hour Service

All professionals interviewed were under the impression that the Call Centre was open 24 hours 7 days a week. From my experience in the field this is a common misapprehension about Child Youth and Family that predates the existence of the Call Centre. Five professionals had complaints about how an after hours call was handled by the after hours system; one respondent said that they had received an excellent service after hours. Most respondents thought that a 24 hour operation would be beneficial to them.

Consistency and Timeliness

Most respondents also felt that the consistency of always having the telephone answered and always having access to an intake social worker was extremely useful. Two respondents had experienced delays of between one and ten minutes whilst trying to make a notification to the Call Centre. Those from the Christchurch and Rangiora areas had had significant delays getting an initial response when the Call Centre first expanded

to cover their area however they had noted improvement in the grade of service and had not experienced similar delays since.

Many respondents cited receiving a consistent and instant response from the Call Centre, as one of the benefits of making a notification to a centralised unit. Many felt that the process of making a notification is now streamlined and consistent. Some cited that the calm, respectful and professional response they received made the process of notification easier. Several noted and applauded the separation of the response decision from the sites capacity to respond.

Professional Service

Others felt that the follow through they received, e.g. calls being returned when social workers said they would, faxed forms being sent and acknowledgement letters gave them more confidence than they previously had in Child Youth and Family's ability to respond to care and protection matters. Some cited previous experiences with making notifications to site social workers where they experienced wide variations in processes and thresholds, e.g. having student social workers take notifications, no one available to take a notification, or calls not returned. Others mentioned ongoing difficulties making contact with site social workers by telephone; one rural professional stated that they would track down social workers at court or community meetings if they absolutely had to speak to a social worker.

Several professionals (police) had experienced difficulties with faxed notifications with the Call Centre, (all the officers interviewed used faxed referrals routinely). Some felt that faxed referrals sometimes fell into "black holes", others felt that they were valuable ways of making referrals because of the audit trail they left.

Communication

Most professionals appreciated receiving an acknowledgement letter of their referral, two felt that this was a waste of time particularly with faxes as they already had confirmation slips. Some letters arrived after the file was transferred to another branch and was of nuisance value. Some professionals also noted that it was more important to receive updates from site social workers during the course of the investigation. These comments were predominantly from areas where sites had a history of large numbers of unallocated cases. Nearly all of the regular referrers expressed an interest in making email referrals.

Cultural Sensitivity

Comments about the need for Call Centre social workers to have knowledge of Maori language and tikanga ranged from being vital, which the majority of respondents felt, to important but not essential. Most felt that Call Centre workers needed to practice basic principles of acceptance and respect for difference with cultures other than maori but that Maori were the first priority. Of the small group who thought that knowledge of maori language and tikanga was not crucial, some felt that the Call Centre was a conduit and that site staff had a greater need for have this knowledge, some thought that language was not so important but correct pronunciation and understanding of spelling was more important. South Island participants were more strongly represented in this group as was the police. Of the three respondents from Maori organisations, all felt that knowledge of correct pronunciation and tikanga enabled rapport to be built right from the start.

Anonymity and Distance

Several professionals working in small rural or provincial areas valued the distance that a call centre can create, as it offered a certain degree of anonymity to professionals who work within small communities and some felt they had been labelled 'nuisances' or that

they got the impression their calls were not always welcomed by already overloaded site staff. Whilst they could also see the benefit this might have for whanau and family members notifying about others in a small community, or for people with community standing to make contact with some degree of anonymity, the main benefit they observed was that it created distance that enabled them to continue with a positive and at times enhanced relationship with site staff.

Telephony

Professionals had very little comment to make about TSO's apart from a general sense that they were extremely prompt and efficient (some mentioned delays during initial site roll out of Christchurch and Rangiora areas) and were useful to make contact with staff from different parts of the country. However several participants commented on the telephone services for National Office (not covered by the Call Centre) where difficulties locating staff attached to particular projects or strategies caused significant frustrations to callers. A further matter was that it was difficult to obtain information about the telephony service as the contact is fleeting and would be best evaluated by the more immediate process of calling back soon after contact.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Expectations of Quality

Few people can avoid the use of call centres with the exponential growth of the call centre industry. Call centres now form vital functions in managing relationships between customers and clients in many organisations. There is an increasingly clear message from the community and professionals requiring a prompt and efficient service from Child Youth and Family and the Government. From the data collected for this report, it seems that professionals have enjoyed the efficiencies that can be obtained by the use of a National Call Centre and cited that the following features were highly valued:

- The telephone is answered promptly and efficiently
- A social worker is always available to respond to queries or notifications
- A calm, respectful and professional response to callers
- The use of a free phone number
- Open and effective communication
- Reliable follow through of calls
- Separation of the response from resourcing decision

There are several unmet needs or frustrations, primarily that a local office based service is not available where professionals and or families are known to social workers receiving the notification, that the Call Centre service provided is not 24 hours seven days a week, some professionals experienced long waits on the telephone and delays in managing faxed referrals. The most keenly felt frustration related to sites ability to follow up notifications rather than the process of making notifications.

Whilst there is very little research into caller satisfaction the literature suggests that the quantitative measurement of call centres outlined in the early TARP reports is no longer the only measurement of performance and success. Despite the multitude of performance value metrics that are used to evaluate call centres currently, preliminary research suggests that there are only two factors that have a positive relationship with caller satisfaction, that is calls being answered (before abandonment) and resolution of the call first time (Feinberg et al, 2000). Long and unexplained waiting times impacts on caller perceptions of service and as callers receive increased levels of service it appears that expectations rise. This suggests that outcomes are just, as if not more, important than outputs in terms of measuring caller satisfaction.

Overall Level of Support for the Call Centre

There is considerable ambivalence about the concept of making notifications through call centres by professionals, mainly because of the loss of connection between the notifier and the person receiving the information and the history of family, locality etc. In professional services such as Child Youth and Family, the inter-sectorial relationships and establishment of links and networking are essential to the work as evidenced by recent initiatives such as Strengthening Families and Community Liaison Social Workers. The preference for traditional office-based, and in-person services, is reflected in a preliminary customer-satisfaction study however, when participants were selected for recent use of a call centre much smaller differences were found (Bennington et al, 2000). It appears that there may be increased acceptability after a positive experience using a call centre.

Relationship of Professionals to Local Offices and the Call Centre

There does not appear to be a direct impact of the Call Centre on the relationship between the professionals spoken to and the sites, however in a previous report, site staff felt that the introduction of the Call Centre had made a significant impact on the relationship between professionals and community (CYF, 2001a). There could be several explanations for this: either site staff's relationships with community organisations had deteriorated, or there had been insufficient time for external agencies to understand and build confidence in the Call Centre. Another possibility is that the staff and sites studied for that report had not embraced the concept of the Call Centre and this impacted on the communities' perceptions of the Call Centre.

Whilst over half the participants volunteered that they had excellent relationships with local offices and many appreciated the immediate services that they received from the Call Centre, several indicated (and I would agree) that the most important relationship for professionals to have was with their local site office. Many felt that it was more important to receive increased communication from sites once the notification was received. In areas of high unallocated cases participants were more likely to think that the Call Centre had generated more work, had not processed the work or increased the work for their local site. Many were concerned about Child, Youth and Family's local sites ability to respond to work, although some noted a slight improvement over the last year.

As outlined earlier participants' preference was to make referrals locally to site offices, however when using the Call Centre, many did not have an expectation that Call Centre workers would have special knowledge of their area. Most felt that it was important to have a general knowledge of New Zealand and be familiar with place names and noted times when they had to spell a common place name or identify a locality. Several participants mentioned the possibility of Child Youth and Family running two call

centres, one in the North Island and one in the South to reduce the amount of general knowledge social workers had to hold. This may possibly meet the need for a closer community connection to intake social workers and an increased likelihood of social workers having some in depth knowledge of the community the notifier worked in. At this stage believe it is unlikely to eventuate due to the costs of establishing another call centre. This subject already having been canvassed earlier by a working party.

Most of the previous Departmental reports, CYF (1999), (2001a), (2001c) have cited the community's preference to make contact with a local social worker or supervisor to discuss potential referrals. Whilst some authors (2001a), (2001c) have considered this a duplication of effort, this process took on new meaning after several respondents noted that because of the lack of very specific local knowledge in the Call Centre, particularly in borderline cases of neglect, professionals are almost forced to make notifications. Whereas, if this matter was handled by a social worker or supervisor locally with in depth community knowledge, a referral could be averted by redirecting the enquiry to a more suitable community organisation. Of further concern was the impact of the Call Centre on maori or iwi groups making referrals, where relationships and connectedness form a far more important role. This process appears to be a valuable one and perhaps should be encouraged in light of the New Directions policy and strengths based practice. However Call Centre staff needs to understand that this is a screening process, not a referral that has been passed off. Another factor that may contribute to this is the National Resource Directory, a resource database that was released with the new computer client records system, CYRAS. This directory has proved unwieldy for intake social workers to use and many site social workers are unaware of its existence. (CYF, 2001d). The directory is no longer current and there is no system in place to update the information and no allocated responsibility to ensure this occurs.

Further anomalies exist about call centres: firstly that they are highly visible as they are usually the first point of contact from the public; secondly, they are also virtually indistinguishable from the rest of the organisation to the public. During the interviews it was difficult, at times, to establish in which part of the organisation issues had arisen, even with detailed knowledge of the structure and roles within the organisation. Many complaints about Child, Youth and Family that were attributed to the Call Centre were in fact about services provided by sites or about funding issues for the Department as a whole. Several professionals requested a pamphlet about the Call Centre to explain how it worked and its relationship to their local site, a recommendation in the Audit report echoes this request for further information and clarification, (CYF, 2001d), but no plans currently exist to formulate a pamphlet.

Rural Issues

In the two rural areas, where all the participant professionals identified having an excellent relationship with the local sites or were attempting to develop relationships, both groups of participants felt positively towards the Call Centre and did not have any ideas for improvement. It is possible that the small size of the sites may have had something to do with the closer working relationship with the community. In rural areas professionals tend to work closely out of necessity. Every participant in these areas felt that the Call Centre had either improved his or her relationship with the site or had no impact. A participant in a metropolitan area noted that when the smaller localised sites were closed down in the early 1990's, the ability to maintain a close working relationship with Child Youth and Family suffered tremendously. The same participant had not caught up with the latest round of regional restructuring and was disenchanted with Child Youth and Family overall. It appears then that the site's relationship with the local community has far more bearing on perceptions of the Call Centre than any other factor apart from receiving poor service from the Call Centre and a philosophical opposition to the concept of Call Centres.

Evaluation

A large evaluation programme is planned to assess the effectiveness of the National Call Centre and the impact on a range of issues including the relationship to strengths based practice, as well as the variations in impact on metropolitan, provincial and rural sites and the impact on the relationship between sites and local communities. The issues raised in this report reinforce the need to examine strengths based practice not only in relation to the Call Centre but also to sites regarding the intake process and networking. The link between unallocated cases and customer satisfaction also needs to be examined in more depth as it is almost impossible to separate the functioning of the Call Centre from the Department as a whole. However if an ongoing internal evaluation program had been devised at the Call Centre's inception, which was comprehensive and accumulative, much of the information required may now be available.

New evaluations are moving towards measuring service quality which are based on soft data of feelings, perceptions and expectations and requirements such as empathy and courtesy (Broetzmann, 1995). This is infinitely more difficult to measure but crucial. Best practice in call centres is well documented but public sector agencies and social service agencies need to ensure that client centred service is adapted to the specific needs of the client. The agency in turn needs to be backed by sufficient resources (including staffing) to ensure that quality outcomes are achieved (Auditor General, 1999). This point was reinforced by participants in this study, it is one thing to provide an excellent Call Centre service however if the intake is unable to be investigated, the purpose of having a Call Centre service whose role was to improve relationships with outside stakeholders is defeated.

Perhaps some of the anxiety around the National Call Centre is generated out of the lack of ongoing evaluative material, and contradictory and frequently anecdotal reports generated thus far. In addition the field is so new that the level of understanding about how the Call Centre operates is low within the Department and the community as a whole. An internal education program about the Call Centre is being planned for February 2002 to address this within the Department (CYF, 2001d). Currently there are no templates, no comparison with best practice guidelines of similar call centres – there is much to be learned.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The sense of disconnection that the community feels from the government is not limited to the use of call centres. Call centres are increasingly an integral part of large and medium sized organisations and cannot be considered in isolation in the eyes of the users and therefore in evaluations. The preference for localised, in-person service, is also not limited to human services, but few people can now escape using call centres as they now dominate service in many fields from computer helpdesks to banking and insurance industries. Despite the philosophical opposition to the use of call centres many people also enjoy the considerable benefits of the services they provide such as the instantaneous response, 24 hour seven day a week operations and customer service focus. There appears to be an increased expectation of customer services that has reached government and local government services.

Contrary to a previous study the participants in this study felt that their relationship with local sites had improved or stayed the same, since the introduction of the Call Centre. Additionally those from rural sites also felt positively towards the Call Centre and could suggest no improvements to the service already provided, apart from making it localised. The small sample size of this study, and the limitation to professionals means that some caution must be exercised in interpreting the results. The sample was also weighted towards rural and South Island participants. However the findings of this study suggest that despite the preference for localised services, professionals do not have the same expectations for local knowledge from Call Centre social workers but they do expect respect and mutual trust. The results suggest that it is more important for professionals to have a close working relationship with local site staff, that reducing unallocated lists of

DRAFT

cases will have a major impact on the community's perception of the Department than any other factor. The Call Centre is a conduit to the rest of the Department; it has been successful in standardising telephone services and separating resource issues from response decision-making. It has standardised the intake process. The Call Centre has also, according to the respondents in this study, improved, in some cases, the relationship professionals have had with site offices.

Recommendations

Given the findings and discussion regarding this study I make the following recommendations:

- Site frontline staff to continue to use community networking and liaison roles to screen referrals and provide updated telephone lists of staff to local professionals.
- Call Centre staff acknowledge the screening process undertaken by site staff as a valuable contribution to managing Child Youth and Family notifications.
- Exploration of a training package for Call Centre staff of New Zealand geography, to build a basic understanding of New Zealand localities.
- Exploration of the link between size of Child Youth and Family Site Offices and the ability to develop close cooperative relationships with the Community as per the New Directions and strengths based strategy.
- An information sheet or pamphlet is formulated for the use of Community Liaison Social Workers and Intake Social Workers to respond to requests from the community for more information regarding the Call Centre.
- Consideration is given to nationwide publicity when the Call Centre is open 24 hours seven days a week, to develop community understanding of the Call Centre.
- Assignment of a single point of responsibility for updating the National Resource Directory and/or exploration of private sector computer based national resource databases that are regularly maintained to support Intake Social Workers fielding enquiries and referring to appropriate agencies.
- A trial email address for notifications by professionals.
- Proactive internal evaluation program be designed to assess service to the various stakeholders, including professionals, family/whanau, maori/iwi service providers, sites and other internal stakeholders.
- Networking of National Call Centre operations staff to existing call centres (internationally) to capitalise on existing knowledge, and experience in this new and innovative field.

APPENDIX 1

MASSEY UNIVERSITY HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

To	O	OR
Secretary	Secretary	Secretary
: Human Ethics	R Human Ethics	Human Ethics
Committee	Committee	Committee
Principal's Office	Old Main Building	Block 5
Albany	Turitea, Palmerston	Wellington
	North	

Please send/deliver this original (1) application plus eleven (11) copies

**APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF PROPOSED
TEACHING/RESEARCH
PROCEDURES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

APPLICANT(S): Name: Sheryl Gault
Department: Department of Social & Cultural Studies
Contact Email/Number: 620 6499
Status: Master Of Social Work (Applied)

PROJECT: Name of Employer: Department of Child Youth and
Family Services
Title: : The needs of professionals who notify Child
Abuse and Neglect to the Department of Child Youth &
Family National Call Centre
Status: Applied Masters Research Project (179.799)
Funding Source: Self Funded
Clinical Trial yes ☐ no ☐
Status:

ATTACHMENTS: Information Sheet
Consent Form

SUPERVISOR(S): Name: Marilyn Waring
Department: Department Of Social and Cultural
Studies

SIGNATURE(S): Applicant(s):
Supervisor(s):

DATE:

OFFICE USE ONLY

Received:

Decision:

1. DESCRIPTION

1.1 Justification

In my work as a Social Worker in the Department of Child Youth and Family Services, in the field and latterly in the National Call Centre, I have become aware of the importance of developing and maintaining relationships with professionals and agencies in the field and working collaboratively. In order to maintain and develop relationships, feedback loops are important to continually improve services. Traditionally statutory agencies dealing with involuntary clients have few formal feedback loops from the community and rely primarily on output and outcome categories to monitor progress. The National Call Centre for Child Youth and Family is a relatively new phenomenon, in operation only since 1997. It is in a unique position as the first point of contact with the Department for all enquiries and notifications where previously this task was divided amongst 52 Offices. The Call Centre was set up in response to a major review of Child Youth and Family Services in Auckland under the Metropolitan Project. The primary objectives in establishing the Call Centre were to:

- standardise telephone services
- improve access to intake services
- achieve national consistency in the management of notification intake thresholds
- improve relationships with stakeholders and partners in the child welfare sector
- integrate management and delivery of social work intake services
- relieve pressure on sites to allow social workers greater time to focus on investigation/assessment and subsequent case management phases.

Evaluations of the Call Centre to date has focused on departmental needs and so far have consisted of implementation reviews, and expansion projects and audit reviews. An initial review of the Auckland Call Centre in 1999 found that the introduction of the Call Centre seemed to improve relationships with agencies. However in a small survey of two predominantly rural Sites, feedback has indicated that particularly in the areas of local knowledge and maintenance of local interagency relationships the Call Centre appears to have performed less well. Notifiers' needs have tended to be defined by perceived needs of Site staff and anecdotal evidence.

This research project will look at the expressed needs of a group of Notifiers to the Department – professionals and agencies to ascertain what their actual needs are when making notifications through a Call Centre. I am interested in exploring this area from the perspective of professional needs rather than Departmental needs as the latter are already well defined and documented. Additionally there is very little written on Call Centres and although they often arise in response to a review of services it is important to return to the original purpose and consider whether that need is still current or whether it has changed.

1.2 Objectives

The purpose of the study is to identify what needs Notifiers have in relation to making Notifications through a Call Centre in order to develop a feedback process that reflects their and their clients needs, rather than primarily those of the Department. This will include identifying a range of needs that may differ according to professional groups including the Police, Courts, Social Workers, Hospitals, Maori or Iwi social services. Additionally it will address differences of rural and provincial areas.

The research will focus on the perspectives of the professional and agencies that are most likely to notify to the Department. It will also highlight the areas of the current system that are working well and what needs to be improved and how they will know when it has improved. The purpose is to provide information that will assist in developing evaluation tools that can monitor and contribute to improving the service provided by the National Call Centre to professionals and agencies working with children and families.

1.3 Procedures for Recruiting Participants and Obtaining Informed Consent

Prior to recruiting participants I will review existing audit reports and surveys to ensure that I am not recruiting informants from areas surveyed recently. I will also undertake scoping interviews with the Manager and National Manager of the Call Centre. The purpose of these interviews is to clarify areas that have already been covered (there is an audit review underway). To identify background and information to develop themes and possible questions to be asked in the Notifier interviews that follow. This will also help identify geographical areas that have been covered and areas that might suit the range of geographical locations needed to obtain a wider spread. A range of geographical regions is necessary to identify broader issues and exclude issues associated with one particular Child Youth and Family Site. It is also important to address the range of areas covered by the Call Centre, as it appears from the limited surveys completed already, that there is potentially large differences of opinion between rural and urban and provincial areas.

I will examine CYF reports on sources of notifications in the areas to identify professional categories that refer in that area. Only those geographical areas that have been covered by the Call Centre for more than 6 months will be selected – as this will allow time for professionals to have made use of the Call Centre and for initial implementation problems to be resolved.

I will then search local directories and contact the Community Liaison Social Worker (from Child Youth and Family) for each area to identify potential participants who meet the criteria for the research, which includes professionals or agencies that either refer currently or potentially will contact CYF to discuss or report a Child Protection matter.

Potential participants will be contacted by letter and invited to participate, I will follow this letter up by a telephone call assuring them that participation is voluntary and ask if they are unable to participate that they pass the letter on to someone who may be able to participate. I will ask if they are willing to pass the letter on that they check out with the

other person that they pass the name back to me for follow up. If a professional then agrees to participate and returns the consent, I will then arrange for a suitable time for a telephone interview. I will probably need to cover 5 different geographical areas, and approach up to 5 different agencies in the area which will cover a range of Health, Education, Justice, Iwi/Maori and Community groups.

1.4 Procedure in which Research Participants will be involved

I will undertake 10 – 15 semi structured interviews of approximately 30 minutes duration by telephone. Due to the geographical spread of the areas involved and short time I have available interviews will need to be conducted over the telephone at a time scheduled to suit the participant. I will investigate recording options but envisage that it is more likely that notes will be the primary source of recording. If I am able to record the calls – permission will be sought for this. The range of themes to be explored will probably encompass the following areas however further categories may be added after key informant interviews:

- Issues regarding local knowledge of the area
- Timeliness of response to calls
- Feedback measures to Notifiers e.g. letters to Notifiers confirming receipt of notifications
- Availability of other modes of communication i.e. Email, faxed and written notifications

1.5 Procedures for handling information and material produced in the course of the research including raw data and final research report(s)

If tapes are used then they will not be transcribed and will be erased on completion and marking of the project, as will notes from interviews. There will be no names or identifying characteristics of individual participants or agencies in the report. A copy of the final draft will be submitted to the Research Access Committee of the Department of Child Youth and Family Services for legal and privacy aspects to be checked. Two copies of the final report will be submitted to the university. A final copy will be made available to the National Manager of the Call Centre with a view towards developing evaluation tools for Notifiers.

Data collected during the research project will be stored in my home in a locked cabinet that only I will have access to.

2. ETHICAL CONCERNS

2.1 Access to Participants

As the participants are professionals already working in cooperation with other agencies I anticipate that most will have the skills to decline to participate if they do not wish to. I will make it clear that participation is voluntary and is not related to their relationship with local Site Offices and comments will not be fed back to local offices unless they wish. I will advise participants that their details were obtained through local directories and by contacting the local Community Liaison Social Worker for the Department of Child Youth and Family Service.

2.2 Informed Consent

The Information Sheet will include all details of the research and the role of participants. The form includes the objectives, methodology of the project and the use of the information at the end of the project. An indication of the time commitment from participants is also included so that participants understand the time needed.

2.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality

The research will take cognizance of ethical issues that pertain to research and will ensure that participants are treated with respect, as will be their information.

Participants will be advised of my dual role as a Supervisor in the Call Centre (currently on leave) and student researcher. If they pass on information that reveals the safety of a child is at risk I will either encourage them to make a notification to Child Youth and Family through their local office by visiting a duty social worker or telephoning the Call Centre. Forms will be provided for a written non-urgent notification. If the situation requires immediate assistance then I would recommend that they contact the police. If the professional is unwilling to do so and I have sufficient information I will pass the information onto the Call Centre or Police myself.

Participants will be anonymous to readers of the research as names and identifying details of geographical regions will be removed. Apart from the above exception all other aspects of confidentiality will be observed.

Information provided by key informants will not be anonymous or confidential and they will be informed of this prior to interview.

2.4 Potential Harm to Participants

As all social agencies are overloaded and under pressure the most potential harm is that valuable time could be wasted for a project that has more relevance to the Call Centre and a minimal benefit for the professional apart from improving a service and responsiveness. I hope to avoid this by making as few contacts as possible with the participant – by

following up the information letter with a phone call and offering an interview on the same day once consent is given.

2.5 Potential Harm to Researcher

I do not envisage harm to myself apart from issues that arise from a conflict of interest in being an employee and of the Service this will be discussed under 2.8.

2.6 Potential Harm to University

I am aware of my responsibilities as a representative of Massey University and that my conduct reflects on the reputation of the University and the need to act professionally at all times. I am aware that this includes the need to honour commitments made to participants and in managing time well to carry out the research as arranged.

2.7 Participants Right to Decline to Take Part

Participation is voluntary and this is made clear in the Information Sheet and in the follow up call inviting participation. I hope by providing the opportunity to pass on the Information Sheet and Consent Form to another professional in the same agency or field this will reinforce voluntary participation.

2.8 Uses of the Information

The information will only be used for the purpose of this research. The Final report will be retained but all other information in the form of tapes or notes will be destroyed. A copy of the Final Report or Summative Findings will be provided to the National Call Centre for the Department of Child Youth and Family Services. The use of the information sheet is included in the Information Sheet.

2.9 Conflict of Interest/Conflict of Roles

The conflict of interest, which is likely to arise, is as a result of my dual role as a Social Work Supervisor and Researcher. Participants are advised of this in the Information Sheet. Prior to interview I will make clear that any information that compromises the safety issue that needs to be acted upon by Child Youth and Family or the Police will be passed on.

2.10 Other Ethical Concerns

None foreseen.

3. LEGAL CONCERNS

3.1 Legislation

3.1.1 Intellectual Property Legislation

None.

3.1.2 Human Rights Act 1993

Procedures and content of the research will ensure that the rights of participants are respected at all times.

3.1.3 Privacy Act 1993

Information that is collected will be used for the purpose of the research project and for developing a feedback loop for the Call Centre. This is made clear in the Information Sheet. No names or identifying details of participants will be included in the report. Every effort will be made to ensure anonymity although anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

3.1.4 Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992

None.

3.1.5 Accident Rehabilitation Compensation Insurance Act 1992

None.

3.1.6 Employment Contracts Act 1991

None.

3.2 Other Legal Issues

No other known legal issues.

4. CULTURAL CONCERNS

The participants are likely to come from a range of different cultures. I will follow normal guidelines of appropriate behaviour for social workers in cultural awareness and respect for difference. I envisage that a significant proportion of professionals are likely to be Pakeha, I am however endeavouring to include Iwi or Maori groups and professionals and will utilize advice and guidance about contact either from Community Liaison Social Workers about local protocols – this will also apply to other groups as

well and appropriate representatives from other ethnic communities will be consulted as needed.

5. OTHER ETHICAL BODIES RELEVANT TO THIS RESEARCH

5.1 Ethics Committees

The Department of Child, Youth and Family Services Research Access Committee approval will need to be sought prior to starting the Research Project and after Massey University Human Ethics Committee approval is obtained. As I am seeking access to some statistical information about the source of Notifications in geographical areas and for access to several staff members for key informant interviews and to Community Liaison Social Workers for information about local contacts in various agencies that potentially refer to the Department.

5.2 Professional Codes

None

6. OTHER RELEVANT ISSUES

None anticipated at this stage.

APPENDIX 3

INFORMATION SHEET

Re: The needs of professionals who notify Child Abuse and Neglect to the Department of Child Youth & Family National Call Centre

I am conducting research for a thesis to complete a Degree of Masters in Social Work (Applied) at Massey University, Albany. This letter is to outline some information about the project. This research will be carried out by Sheryl Gault, I am a year two student at Massey University Albany and also a Supervisor at the National Call Centre for the Department of Child, Youth and Family's Service. The Supervisor of the research is Marilyn Waring, lecturer at Massey University.

Sheryl Gault 0508 326 459 ext 5846
Marilyn Waring 09 443 9665

This research project has arisen out of the development of a National Call Centre for the Department of Children, Young Persons and Their Family's Service. The research is intended to be exploratory and to focus on the needs of professional notifiers when making notifications to the Department. This will assist with identifying issues for Notifiers and may contribute to developing practice standards and further evaluation of the Call Centre to respond to those needs. A summary of the research findings will be available to participants should they want it.

Professionals working in fields that are likely to make notifications to the Department have been invited to participate from several locations around Aotearoa/New Zealand. A range of professions has been identified as have a range of geographical locations. If you are interested in participating please return the attached consent form to me and I will arrange a convenient interview time. Participants will be contacted by telephone for a telephone interview, which will take between 15 and 30 minutes. Interviews will be recorded on audio tape with consent of the participant.

Please note that when you choose to participate in the study you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw at any time
- Ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time.
- Ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation
- Provide information on the understanding that it is completely confidential to the research. All information is collected anonymously, and it will not be possible to identify you in any reports that are prepared from the study
- To provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission.
- Be given access to a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded.

The material collected from the telephone interviews will be kept secured from any other person, names of participants will not be used in the thesis and geographical locations will not be mentioned in relation to specific quotations that is likely to identify the participant. All material will be destroyed after examination of the final project.

If you do not wish to participate and you know of someone who might, please feel free to pass this information onto them.

Please contact me if you would like any other information or want to discuss anything else about being involved.

APPENDIX 4

By Facsimile: 09 914 1211 Attention Sheryl Gault
By Mail: National Call Centre
Child Youth and Family Services,
Private Bag 78-901
Grey Lynn,
AUCKLAND Attention: Sheryl Gault

The needs of professionals who notify Child Abuse and Neglect to the Department of
Child Youth & Family National Call Centre

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Letter and have had the details of the study explained to me.

My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask
further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I also understand that I have the right to ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at
any time during the interview.

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to
answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will
not be used without my permission.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

APPENDIX 5

12 September 2001

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: The needs of professionals who notify Child Abuse and Neglect to the Department of Child Youth & Family National Call Centre

As the Manager of the National Call Centre for Child Youth and Family I am writing to confirm that I am aware of the research project on the needs of Professionals who are Notifiers to the Department. I am interested in the results of the project and support the gathering of information for this project. Sheryl Gault is a supervisor of the National Call Centre and has been in the Department in various roles for 11 years. She is currently on leave and has the Call Centre's support.

Yours sincerely,

Shona Flood
Manager
National Call Centre

APPENDIX 6

Dear:

I am conducting research for a thesis to complete a degree of Masters in Social Work (Applied). I am interested in the experiences and needs of professionals who notify the Department of Child Youth and Family Services about suspected abuse, neglect or other concerns, through the National Call Centre.

I am interested in interviewing professionals who have made notifications recently to the Department or who might be likely to in the near future. I intend to use the information collected to help develop feedback loops to the National Call Centre and to improve the service provided. Full information about the project is included in the Information Sheet attached.

If you are not able to participate or feel someone else would be more suitable, I would very much appreciate you passing the attached Information Sheet and Consent form on to someone who might be able to participate. Once they return the consent form to me by fax, I will arrange a convenient time to conduct a telephone interview. I will contact you by telephone to follow up this letter and ascertain whether you or someone else might be available for interview.

Please telephone me by leaving a message at 0508 326 459 if you would like any other information or want to discuss anything else about involvement in this project.

Sincerely,

Sheryl Gault

Email: sheryl.gault001@cyf.govt.nz

Address: National Call Centre, Private Bag 78 901, Grey Lynn, AUCKLAND

Facsimile: 09 914 1211

Free phone 0508 326 459

Enc: Information Sheet

Consent Form

Letter of Support from Child Youth and Family

APPENDIX 7

CALL CENTRE NOTIFIER INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

As at 19 November 2001

Interview with:

Role:

Agency:

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

1. What do you know about the Call Centre and what it does?

Explain the two tiers – social worker, enquiry and notification and TSO, hours etc..

SOCIAL WORK

2. How frequently have you made enquiries or referrals to an Intake Social Worker?

By Mail, fax, email or telephone

Weekly

Monthly

Annually

COMPARISONS

3. Have you made referrals to CYF prior to the Call Centre?

No – go to 5

Yes – see below

4. What differences did you notice with the introduction of the Call Centre?

Thinking about referrals you have made since the Call Centre started

5. What is useful or of value about this service?

Can you say why?

What would be the signs it was of value?

What specifically worked well?

6. What is not useful?

Can you say why?

What would be the signs it was not of value?

What specifically didn't work?

7. What would you prefer?

Can you say why?

8. What would you like to see improved or changed?

Can you say why?

9. What impact has the Call Centre had on relationships with local staff?

1-2-3-4-5

10. What importance would you place on an intake worker having local knowledge of the area you come from?

TSO

Thinking about the telephone reception service

11. Have you rung the Call Centre to be put through to individuals or sites?

How frequently do you make phone calls?

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Seldom

Never

COMPARISON

12. Have you made contact with CYF prior to the Call Centre?

No - go to 14

Yes - see below

Thinking about the service you've had since the Call Centre was introduced to your area.

13. What differences have you noticed with the introduction of the Call Centre?

14. What was of value in this service to you

Can you say why?

What would be the signs it was of value?

What specifically worked well?

15. What is not useful?

Can you say why?

What would be the signs it was not of value?

What specifically didn't work?

16. What would you prefer?

Can you say why?

17. What would you like to see improved or changed?

Can you say why?

THEMES

I am going to ask questions about themes. If you could rank these on a scale of 1- 5, one having the least importance or lowest impact, five having the most.

18. What importance would you place in the Call Centre environment on:

- Knowledge of Maori language and tikanga
- Knowledge of other cultures such as pacific peoples
- Answering the telephone in under 5 rings (20 seconds)
- Getting through to the right person first time
- Respect

19. Any other comments?

20. Do you want a summary of the findings?

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GLOSSARY

Abandonment Rate

The rate of inbound calls that result in callers hanging up before an agent is available to respond.

Automatic Call Distributor (ACD)

A machine that receives and processes incoming telephone calls and routes them to the TSR waiting the longest. It also answers and queues calls during busy periods and plays recorded announcements. It can handle multiple queues.

Average Speed of Answer (ASA)

A measure of the average time that it takes for a telephone call to be answered from when the call arrives at the ACD to when a TSR receives the call.

Benchmark

A continuous, systematic evaluation of the telephone customer contact process, comparing with organisations that are representing best practices, for the purpose of continually improving ones own organisational processes.

Best in Class (BIC)

A call centre superior to all others.

Call Centre

Workplaces where customer service telephone agents are physically located in a room or building. Agents are supported by sophisticated information and communication technology systems using a pooling process, which assists them to answer telephone enquiries from customers and or undertake sales and marketing activities (telemarketing). Call centres can vary in size from a few to several hundred seats.

Computer Telephony Integration (CTI)

A system that combines the capabilities of a computer with that of a telephone system by enabling voice and data to come together and communicate with each other. By the time a customer talks to an agent, all their account information is linked up. This can perform tasks such as 'screen popping' where a customer is identified immediately when they phone in by the telephone number they are calling from. IVR and CTI can be combined.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

The business, marketing and communications strategy for managing the customer relationship across different aspects of customer contact.

CYRAS

Care and Protection, Youth Justice, Residential and Adoptions System. This social work database is used for case management by Child, Youth and Family social workers. It also operates a community resource database. It replaced the previous system, SWIS, which was shut down permanently in December 2000. Data from SWIS was transferred to CYRAS.

Direct Dial Inquiry

Telephoning a number, which directs a caller to someone's desk rather than through an operator.

Grade of Service (GOS)

The percentage of inbound calls that will be answered within a predetermined amount of time, it is the measure of promptness of response to inbound calls. It is expressed as a percentage of calls answered within how many seconds. A common GOS is 80/20 – which is 80% of all incoming calls are answered within 20 seconds. It also known as Service Level.

Interactive Voice Response (IVR)

A cost saving system which can give information and or process information given to it over the telephone by way of telephone keypads – a common example is telephone banking. It can also be used to connect callers to people without using a TSR.

Level Of Service

See Grade of Service.

Management Information System - Teleservices (MIS)

A system that works closely with the ACD (see above) and provides information on the number of incoming calls, the duration, the processing time, the service levels and all individual statistics that Managers want such as how long an agent has been logged in to the ACD.

Private Automatic Branch Exchange (PABX) or (PBX)

A private telephone exchange 'box' which processes all incoming and outgoing calls to an office.

Remote Monitoring

The process of listening to and evaluating telephone calls without being noticed by either the TSR (see below) or the customer on the telephone.

Telephone Service Representative (TSR)

A person employed for the purpose of making or receiving calls from clients or customers. There are several variations such as Telephone Service Agents, Telephone Service Operators, Telephone Service Officers and Customer Service Agents or Representatives.

Virtual Call Centre

A call centre which uses a PABX or ACD provided by an outside organisation rather than having privately owned equipment on site.

Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP)

A technology that allows the caller to make free long distance calls over the internet rather than via standard telephone company switches and lines. The only cost associated with VOIP calls is the regular monthly Internet Service Provider (ISP) access charge.