

Workshop 4 Report of Discussion– Informal Care and OSCAR

Informal Care

Further qualitative research is needed to understand the data from the childcare survey on informal care, eg who was providing the care, why parents were using it, what parents are doing while children are in informal care. Without this more specific information it is difficult to determine whether, and if public policy should pay greater attention to assisting those with informal care arrangements.

More information about the barriers parents face in moving children from informal care to more formal arrangements (given there was a high demand expressed for this) is also needed. Better understanding of what parents want or value from using informal care would also assist policy consideration.

OSCAR

Most discussion focused on the care needs of 5-13 year olds. This was from the perspective of the significant numbers of children in this age group in informal care, and the high demand for formal services.

Over the last two decades there has been substantial growth in the number of OSCAR programmes. This has coincided with a period of wide spread social and economic change. Looking back further in time however, participants noted there have been differing views about what's appropriate for children "after school". For example, some talked of going home to empty homes and being expected to peel spuds, get washing in and generally do tasks, while others recalled long afternoons playing in the street, or hanging out at home alone.

Today a number of participants considered the need for adequate care for children has more prominence but that parents views are not necessarily in line with this. It was suggested that placing emphasis on the importance of safe arrangements and how a variety of activities can contribute to aspirations parents might have for their children rather than an emphasis on "care", may be a way to increase interest in and use of appropriate arrangements. Promoting safe activities for children is not suggested because parents want children to be unsafe, just that perceptions of safety are shaped by our own experiences eg. Pacific Island parents not born in New Zealand may be less likely to perceive there are significant safety issues for children alone as perhaps those born in NZ where they have had greater exposure to risk.

There was considerable discussion about what OSCAR is. Some thought it was a particular type of programme. Agreement was reached however, that it is an umbrella term covering a wide range of group arrangements that are child-centered, age appropriate and have a recreation focus. It was important to maintain a degree of flexibility around how OSCAR is defined to ensure that each service can meet the needs of the children it caters for, their parents and the community it is located in.

The diversity of service types is reflective of the multiple aims and objectives that OSCAR contributes to. These include facilitation of parents labour market activity, crime prevention, development of human capital, promotion of positive recreation and opportunities for children and strengthening families.

Three key areas for policy focus were identified

1 Key to continued development of appropriate programmes and ensuring access is widely available is the need for **public promotion** about OSCAR. This needs to clarify what OSCAR is and how it can support children, parents, schools, communities and Government.

2 Adequate **resourcing/funding** of programmes, including access to appropriate facilities, is critical to ensuring children have access to OSCAR.

3 The development of an agreed quality framework and enhancing the quality of programmes to ensure they are child centered and age appropriate will enable realisation of positive child outcomes.

In addition, it was emphasised that policy development needs to be based on enhancing outcomes in multiple policy areas, not just a single area such as parents employment.