

# **Social Marketing as a Tool to Stop Child Abuse and Neglect**

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# **Social Marketing as a Tool to Stop Child Abuse and Neglect**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article briefly outlines how Child, Youth and Family in partnership with Colmar Brunton Research, have applied social marketing to the child abuse prevention strategy (Hall, Stannard & Young, 1998), and subsequently also to child neglect research.

In New Zealand, as in many countries, Government Agencies continue to seek new and creative approaches to resolve long-standing social problems. As the public sector focuses on increasing the effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of tax-payer funded programmes and services there becomes increasing interest in preventative strategies and methods that encourage voluntary compliance. For these reasons social marketing as the application of private sector marketing concepts to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audiences is now being applied to a wide variety of social issues including child abuse and child neglect prevention.

## **1 BACKGROUND**

In 1994 the New Zealand government introduced a statutory responsibility for Child, Youth and Family to educate professionals and the public about child abuse as an alternative to mandatory reporting. The long-term goal of Child, Youth and Family is eventually to eliminate abusive behaviour towards children, as well as child neglect. In partnership with Colmar Brunton Research, a systematic evaluation of the child abuse prevention campaign was completed, using a social marketing framework. In 1999, steps were taken to again apply the social marketing framework, with a focus on child *neglect*. The first section of this paper re-visits the earlier child abuse research, followed by a report of the more recent child neglect research.

## **2 RE-VISITING THE SOCIAL MARKETING AND CHILD ABUSE RESEARCH**

Colmar Brunton and Child, Youth and Family followed Alan Andreasen's approach to social marketing (Andreasen, 1995) which employed the transtheoretical model of behaviour change (Prochaska, Di Clemente, and Norcross, 1992). When applied to the *Breaking the Cycle* campaign the goal is, over a period and within funding constraints, to move the target audiences through four behaviour stages (pre-contemplation, contemplation & preparation, action and maintenance) using the communication tasks shown in the table overleaf.

In addition to the use of communications Child, Youth and Family's inter-agency child abuse reporting protocols and community liaison social work activity make a significant contribution to implementing this model. An information and advice telephone service underpinning the communications provides a bridge for callers to access "self-help" information, telephone counselling and on-referral to community groups or Child, Youth and Family, as appropriate.

**Table 1. Alan Andreasen's Model of Marketing Social Change**

<b>Behaviour stages</b>	<b>Communication task</b>	<b>Breaking the cycle</b>
1. Pre-Contemplation	1. Education	Increase awareness of the option of non-abusive parenting.
2. Contemplation & Preparation	2. Increase the benefits of non-abusive behaviour	Show benefits of not abusing children (eg happy, healthy children, feeling like a good parent, not feeling guilty, enjoying life).
	3. Decrease the costs of non-abusive behaviour	Decrease the costs of not abusing children (eg as parents fear losing control, help them understand they do not always have to be in control and show them positive disciplinary techniques).
3. Action	4. Increase social pressure for non-abusive behaviour	Build on the high awareness and condemnation of child abuse, for more active reporting of suspected abuse from those most likely to detect it (eg teachers, neighbours, relatives, friends).
	5. Increase behavioural control	Make abusers realise that if they abuse children in any way, they are likely to be caught.
	6. Improve ability to act	Help people to recognise signs of abuse and to act upon them, feel comfortable asking for advice or help from friends or family, or contacting an organisation. Help overcome barriers to changing behaviours. Improve awareness of services available to help abusers and victims.
4. Maintenance	7. Reward/remind non-abusive behaviour	Reward people for not abusing their children and reinforce the social benefits of non-abusive behaviour to the community.

Adapted from Andreasen (1995)

### **2.1 Stage three of the *Breaking the Cycle* campaign**

Using the social marketing model, the third stage of the campaign aimed to build on increased public awareness of emotional/verbal abuse, gained in the first stage, by encouraging the target audience to make appropriate changes in its behaviour. Stage three was launched in May 1997. It focused on two aspects of emotional/verbal abuse: arguing and fighting in front of children, and putting children down by yelling, swearing, etc at them.

The primary audience was parents of dependent young children caught in the cycle of emotional/verbal abuse with a secondary audience of close family/whanau or other influencers of the main target group. The primary audience was therefore not current Child, Youth and Family clients, but parents and caregivers capable of self-correcting their behaviour.

Central to this approach was preliminary qualitative research to understand how the target audience perceived the barriers to and benefits of changing their behaviour. It had been assumed that in terms of behaviour change, parents were primarily concerned about benefits to their children. The research results highlighted the fact that parents in the target group were primarily concerned about benefits to themselves. Consequently, the key theme for the stage three advertising was, a change in your behaviour can change the behaviour of your child and make your lives a lot more enjoyable.

Like previous campaigns, the third stage of television advertising was underpinned by community consultation, internal and external communications, radio ads and parenting booklets (English, Maori,

Samoan, Tongan and Cook Island Maori), a toll free information line with a counselling and referral service, a Pacific Islands public relations strategy and a media strategy.

## **2.2 Research results**

Child, Youth and Family has tracked public awareness of child abuse since 1995 using the benchmark study and subsequent campaign monitors (sampling 611 New Zealanders aged 15+). Results were measured across the general population with breakdowns of four categories: NZ/European; Maori; Pacific Island people; and other ethnic groups.

The September 1997 research monitor measured responses to the June/July 1997 advertising activity. Since 1995 the significant trends for unprompted awareness of emotional abuse show:

- An 8 percentage point general increase. With 12 per cent more mention of yelling, shouting, screaming, swearing at a child and a 7 percentage point increase in mention of putting a child down;
- A 22 percentage point increase among Maori;
- A 30 percentage point increase among other ethnic groups.

There have also been significant increases in the recognition of two key behaviours as child abuse (both highlighted by the campaign): Fighting or arguing in front of a child (+10 percentage points); and yelling at, swearing at or putting down a child (+10 percentage points).

For Pacific Islands people particularly there were significant increases in their recognition of fighting and arguing in front of a child (+45 percentage points) as abuse and verbally putting down a child (+20 percentage points).

It must be acknowledged that other events, such as high profile media stories, can influence public awareness and recognition of child abuse. While the increased awareness cannot be attributed solely to the *Breaking the Cycle* campaigns, the latest monitor results on the advertising awareness and new self-reported behaviour change questions are very exciting.

Awareness of the television commercials was very high with 79 per cent of New Zealanders being aware of the “Backwards/Forwards” commercial after just five weeks airtime and 91 per cent aware of “Vicious Cycle” (which built on earlier exposure in stage one). Around two-fifths (39 per cent) of the 15+ population were aware of the stage three radio advertising and it had strong message recall.

With the adoption of the social marketing model, the stage three campaign monitored self-reported contemplation of behaviour change and actual perceived behaviour change in line with Child, Youth and Family objectives.

**Table 2. Behaviour change (contemplated and reported actual)**

Advertisement	Contemplated behaviour change		Reported actual behaviour change	
	% Aware of ad	% of total population	% Aware of ad	% of total population
Backwards/Forwards TVC	56%	44%	20%	16%
Vicious Cycle TVC	47%	43%	18%	16%
Parenting radio ads	48%	19%	12%	5%

The table above shows that 19-44% of the population has thought about changing their behaviour as a result of the campaign and 5-16% of the population stated they had actually changed their behaviour as a result of the campaign. Specifically 8% of the total population stated that in response to the Backward/Forwards TVC they have tried to stop fighting or arguing in front of the child.

Compared with the overall results, Maori and Pacific Islands audiences showed a significantly higher incidence of self-reported contemplation of behaviour change and actual change for both television and radio advertising (see table below).

**Table 3. Reported actual behaviour change overall and among Maori/Pacific Island people**

Advertisement	Reported actual behaviour change for % of total population		
	Overall	Maori	Pacific Island People
Backwards/Forwards TVC	16%	32%	44%
Vicious Cycle TVC	16%	38%	51%
Parenting radio ads	5%	11%	15%

This is a very exciting result as it indicates the campaign may have been more effective amongst traditionally hard to reach minority groups than it has been amongst the majority group.

### 2.3 Reflections

*Breaking the Cycle* is an evolving campaign continually breaking new ground.. As far as we are aware it has been unique internationally in applying social marketing as a social work intervention to change abusive behaviours. Results from the research to date show that the campaign has made a solid start and considerable progress with increasing awareness and self-reported behaviour change, especially with Maori and Pacific Islands people. To sustain this momentum and achieve lasting change we must maintain and build on the positive community response measured so far. Sustained change will need a long-term strategy, carefully monitored at each stage.

The campaign was extended in 1998 to raise awareness of alternatives to smacking and in 1999 to cover the issue of child neglect. The rest of this paper describes the first stage of research used to help develop the Neglect Prevention Program.

## 3 THE 1999 NEGLECT BENCHMARKING RESEARCH

Recently Child, Youth, and Family has extended its child abuse prevention and social marketing approach to encompass the prevention of child neglect, launching its Neglect Prevention Program in May 1999. The aims of Child, Youth and Family's integrated strategy are to promote early detection and intervention in child neglect cases and to encourage families towards 'self-help' assistance. These aims will be achieved through integrated education and assistance programmes, targeted towards

specific audiences. The education and assistance programmes encompass community, professional and public education as well as telephone information, advice, counselling and referral services.

The remainder of this paper reports on the benchmarking research that Colmar Brunton Research conducted in May 1999. Future research measures will be compared with this benchmark to evaluate the effectiveness of the social marketing programme. The application and implications of a social marketing framework for child neglect prevention are also discussed.

### **3.1 Neglect Benchmarking Methodology**

Colmar Brunton Research conducted two benchmark surveys in May 1999. The surveys consisted of 460 face-to-face interviews with parents and caregivers, and 500 telephone interviews among the general public. Qualitative research was undertaken with caregivers and social workers as input into the questionnaire design.

### **3.2 Neglect Benchmarking Results**

#### **3.2.1 Perceptions of what constitutes child neglect**

In general, awareness of neglectful behaviours is widespread among parents and caregivers. The general public tends to have a lower understanding of what constitutes child neglect. Among both these key groups, however, some confusion exists over the distinction between child neglect and child abuse.

#### **3.2.2 Perceived seriousness of the neglect problem**

For most, child neglect is perceived to be a serious problem in New Zealand (81% of caregivers and 75% of the general public). Perceptions of the seriousness of specific behaviours, however, vary markedly. Inadequate care impacting on the physical health of the child is clearly viewed as being most serious, followed by supervisory neglect behaviours and emotional neglect of babies. Emotional neglect of children is considered to be least serious.

#### **3.2.3 Perceived effects of neglect**

High proportions of both caregivers and the general public have opinions on the effects of child neglect. Child neglect is most commonly thought to result in the emotional deprivation of the child (mentioned by 81% of caregivers and 53% of the general public). In this regard, people comment on effects such as low self-esteem/confidence, and feeling unloved or a social misfit.

#### **3.2.4 Contemplating behaviour change**

Caregivers show strongest desire to change behaviours that impact on the emotional well-being of the child. Caregivers are less likely to admit to a need to change supervisory behaviours such as home alone situations and supervising children in potentially dangerous situations.

The behaviour most caregivers want to improve on is spending time doing things together with their child (56%). Between a quarter and a third of all caregivers (both those who do and do not neglect) desire to enhance their parenting skills in relation to other behaviours that impact on the emotional well-being of the child (eg. Give the child hugs, kisses or tell them you love them (31%); Talk, play or sing

to your baby (31%); Read to, or with, your child aged two or over (30%); Tell the child when they have done something well (29%); Talk to your child about how their day was (26%); Help your child with their homework (24%)

Caregivers are least likely to feel they need to change their behaviour in regard to supervisory behaviours. A fifth or less wish to improve the following behaviours: Childproof locks on cupboards for detergents and chemicals (20%); Childproof locks on cupboards for medicines (20%); Supervising child when lighting fires (11%); Taking child with them, or staying with the child, rather than leaving them alone in the house (10%); Supervising a child when they have a candle burning (10%); Using family/friends/neighbours to care for the child rather than leaving them at home (8%).

Data pertaining to the desire to change behaviour was also analysed separately among caregivers who report neglectful behaviours. Due to small sample sizes, this data should be interpreted as being indicative only. However, the data does suggest that caregivers who exhibit neglectful behaviours tend to be more likely to believe that these desired behaviours are not necessary for them personally. Among these caregivers, there is a mix in attitude, with some showing a desire to change their behaviour and others showing no desire to do so.

### **3.3.5 Self-reported measures of behaviour**

Large majorities of caregivers report undertaking the following behaviours every day or several times a day: cuddling/rocking their baby aged under two (98%); talking/singing/playing with their baby aged under two (97%); talking with their child about their day (89%); giving hugs/cuddles/kisses (87%); doing things together (83%); telling their child when they did well (70%). Helping children (aged five to ten) with their homework is less frequently undertaken; 32% of caregivers with children in this age group do this between one and three times a week and 8% had not done this in the last week.

- 17% of caregivers report that they live in a household where detergents and chemicals are kept in an unsafe location.
- 13% of caregivers keep medicines and pills in an unsafe location.
- Fewer than 3% of caregivers admit to having undertaken any of the following neglectful supervisory behaviours in the last couple of months: lighting a fire without supervision, letting the child light a candle with no supervision, leaving a child aged one to six home alone, and leaving a child aged seven to nine home alone.

### **3.3.6 Demographic trends**

Attitudes towards child neglect, as well as self-reported behaviour, vary by demographic group. A few key trends are highlighted below for the caregiver survey:

- Analysis by ethnicity reveals the strongest demographic trends. In summary, Pacific Island caregivers have notably lower levels of understanding of what constitutes neglect and its effects, as well as the seriousness of the problem in general and of specific behaviours. However, Pacific Island caregivers appear more likely, than New Zealand and Maori caregivers, to acknowledge the need to change their behaviour.

- Male caregivers exhibit lower levels of awareness of what constitutes neglect and the seriousness of specific types of neglect. Male caregivers also report spending less time undertaking behaviours that contribute to the emotional well being of children.
- Those in part-time employment tend to have a greater understanding of the types of behaviours that constitute neglect. Those in full-time employment tend to perceive a number of emotional neglect behaviours as less serious than caregivers in part-time or no employment. Caregivers in full-time employment also report spending less time behaving in ways that contribute to the emotional well being of children.
- While the more highly educated respondents show higher levels of awareness of what constitutes neglect and its effects on the child, this group is less likely to perceive child neglect as being a serious problem in New Zealand.
- Caregivers living in high-income households have a greater understanding of what constitutes neglect and its effects. Conversely, however, caregivers in lower income households report spending more time undertaking behaviours that contribute to the emotional well-being of their children.
- Compared to caregivers with older children, those with younger children perceive some emotional neglectful behaviours to be more serious and report spending more time undertaking behaviours that contribute to emotional well-being of children.

## INTEGRATIVE DISCUSSION

A consistent theme has emerged over recent years from the qualitative research Child, Youth and Family and Colmar Brunton Research have undertaken with abusive and neglectful parents. Research indicates that if parents are not exposed to other forms of parenting, are not aware their behaviour is wrong, are not aware of the consequences of their behaviour, and if they have no access to information and/or support, then they are more likely to abuse or neglect their children. Conversely, parents believe that if they are exposed to other forms of parenting, are aware their behaviour is wrong and of its consequences, if they have access to information and/or support, then they will be less likely to abuse or neglect their children. Child, Youth and Family's social marketing programme is based on this underlying premise.

Following the establishment of the benchmark research, the next vital step is the active participation of those working with children and their families in the community-based education programme that starts in August this year. Child, Youth and Family's ability to help prevent child neglect through its prevention programme is dependent on a strengthened partnership with the community and a shared commitment to eliminating the tragic loss of potential seen in New Zealand as a result of ignorance about child neglect.

## AUTHORS

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Jocelyn Rout is Director of Colmar Brunton Research's Social Research Agency in Wellington. Jocelyn has extensive experience in complex research design. She has utilised Andreasen's Social Marketing framework for a range of projects including child neglect, methods of disciplining children, employment, and taxation.

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