



Government inquiry into more effective social services

Submission by Donald Pettitt, Canterbury Men's Centre, 20 October 2014

This submission is a specific critique of the outcomes of the existing service. I haven't the insight into the existing mechanisms or the resources to commit to developing a larger position on this broader issue and ask that the comments below be considered in light of this.

My concern is that though men have arguably worse social outcomes than women we have fewer proactive services available. In my opinion whatever structural changes occur a test to define whether these will lead to improvements would include the projection as to whether the changes will result in an increase in the proportion of resourcing for proactive services for males.

Men consume significantly larger resources in alcohol and drug treatment, as perpetrators of family violence, and as criminals. These services are the "ambulance at the bottom of the cliff". Men have significantly higher levels of completed suicide and are significantly more likely to experience significant loss in time with their children in the event of marital breakdown.

Men are in most cases excluded from care by existing domestic violence victim services solely because of their gender. This is relevant when you consider that in the last six years 24% of intimate partner murders and 41% of family/whanau related deaths were male. Zero support for men in most communities leaves me wondering how the Ministry of Social Development can allow this to happen. It is likely allowable under the Human Rights Act but it would be hard to say that this behaviour is consistent with a general spirit of commitment to human rights. Could it be that the this review also includes consideration of human rights as an issue?

There are models of services for men and fathers in New Zealand but they rarely receive Ministry support. Men's centres are rare in New Zealand compared to women's centres. Father specific support services are also rare. Quite a few agencies that could be considered men's centre are wholly or largely for the purpose of stopping men from being violent.

Men's centres are platforms to do local support projects for men. Counselling (often free), social work interventions, de-escalation or men leading to lower incidences of offending, fewer children experiencing abuse and neglect because the dads have a place to disclose their home lives.

Support services for parents typically exclude fathers by design or practice under the current contracting and do not specifically target their needs leading to less engagement by men with their children and worse outcomes for the children of these men.

My hope is that New Zealand will eventually have a string of support services engaging with men. Men's centres in major centres. Father and Child type agencies in larger centres. Men's Sheds on a much larger scale <http://menzshed.org.nz/>.

Thank you for your consideration.

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