

① How important are the first thousand days of a child's life?
Do we here in New Zealand care enough about our children?
There can be no keener ~~revelation~~ revelation of a society's soul
than how it cares for its children N. Mandela.

Although it's small, it is precious.

1st - quals. Pediatrician, father, grandfather.
Since early 80's with colleagues been doing
my best to ensure that the children of our
community are as healthy, and as capable
as they can be.

In health we've done lots of good things.

- improved standards of care in our maternity services.
- our newborn department
- surgical care of children is fantastic.
- care of children with cancer is ~~been~~ beautifully done.
- immunisation has changed the face of child health medicine. We don't see a fraction of the sick dying and damaged children that we used to.

So you would think we would feel pretty good about this and we sort of do, but there's an elephant in the room.

Some of this is a grandfather "treat" (?) and others reflect the issue that bothers so many of us working in child health.

Pichue - girl uncle. (Holland)
he - warmth pleasure, connection + protection
quality eye contact. rocking. cooing.

Ric x 2 - girl - connection - father - attachment.
bonding - connection = grow and develop an
infants brain.

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Its love and connection that grow and develop an infant's brain.

Pica 3

Same girl 25 yrs later & cousin

- having fun - already got it
- brains largely grown and developed

Over that critical 1st thousand days - timing starts at conception - and with good enough - because you don't have to be perfect - parenting - a child acquires the ability to form a quality of relationship that they are going to need over the rest of their lives. They've got their primary attachment figure usually their mum. They've learned empathy and understanding. They've learned how to have fun and feel good about themselves, and they can tolerate boundaries which means that they can be taught and they can be educated.

Interesting isn't it, that the first thousand days will determine the quality of the next 32,000 days. That if things don't go well, that that can significantly compromise a person's future lifelong.

That first thousand days are a window of opportunity for a child; for a family, and for a country.

In contrast to the pictures of the children that you have just seen, we in child health are increasingly seeing the impacts of poverty: Financial poverty - poverty of parenting, poverty of spirit and hope. All with significant lifelong implications, for the wellbeing of a child. What are we actually seeing? Struggling stressed, tired parents - no time to give to their children. Often young, sometimes addicted lacking their own parental models and lacking parental support. No money means that accessing health care is difficult - no car no petrol. Housing is frequently cold, damp and crowded

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Food is often inadequate. We recently asked one of our early childhood centres how we could help them ~~and~~. Their answer was "food".

All of this is translating into preventable illnesses, in children.

Unnecessarily complicated pregnancies. Severe prematurity - growth retardation - occasionally complicated tragically by a disability. A huge cost to a child, to a family and to a country.

Unnecessarily sick children with lung infections that can go on to cause serious lung issues; long term lung issues like bronchiectasis. Difficult to manage asthma; difficult to manage skin problems - can you imagine trying to look after these if you live in a cold and damp and crowded house, and you've got no money.

We're seeing increasing problems with neglect and child abuse. Increasing serious behavioural issues and mental health issues. Almost certainly a reflection of the needs of those first thousand days not having been met. Problems with attachment, bonding, and for some - brain growth.

These are the children that are going to struggle with education and some will later populate our prisons

I'll never forget a child I once saw. Dad was at home looking after this baby of just a few months of age mum was at the supermarket. The child was crying CONSTANTLY. He was holding the baby like this. The child was crying and he couldn't cope, and he shook the child. (light shake) the child continued to cry. He shook the child again. The child went pale, stopped crying, and a few minutes later, had a convulsion. He brought the kiddie straight to hospital when I explained to him that his child had just had a brain bleed, he leant over his baby and he

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wept and he wept. No-one had taught him how to deal with the situation he found himself in. I wonder if he had ever met a child health worker.

Increasing numbers of grandparents are bringing up their grandchildren. I had in clinic with me recently a grandmother whose transformed the lives of seven children now aged ~~be~~ between 3 and 14. She'd just received a letter from our welfare agencies indicating that she had to go and find a job.

New Zealand has high youth suicide rates, and they are not coming down. There's nothing that I find more distressing than to sit on a committee that reviews those deaths to go back to the NEWBORN NOTES and to find that that situation was predictable and preventable, almost certainly a reflection of the needs of those first thousand days not having been met. (choking back tears)

Community child health services in New Zealand are seriously under-done. We don't have the resources to do the level of home-visiting that we need to. Antenatal education is almost unavailable to those families that need it most. We don't have the midwives the child-health nurses and the social workers to identify and then support those families, those pregnancies that really need it.

I'll take you back to that first picture you saw - just imagine that little girl with her uncle. She was born in Amsterdam. She had a child health nurse in her home 8 hours a day for the first week of her life, teaching her parents how to respond to her needs, and how to organise their home. All children in Holland receive this. Many of the countries of northern Europe have for a long time, had policies processes and systems in place that prioritise the needs of children.

⑤ A country like Holland is closing its prisons, at a time when New Zealand is building them (9.53)

What do the statistics say?

New Zealand is running child poverty figures of around 25-30% of our children. In the early 80's those figures were 10-15%. A country like Finland has figures of 5%. (10.16)

Where do we spend our money?

Take a look at this graph and you'll see that we spend quite a bit + in that first maternity/newborn period but nowhere near enough. Then not much for quite a while, until you get to 55 if you're maori and 65 if you're european and then the dollars spent goes up almost exponentially. And there's a huge dollar under the graph.

If you looked at our welfare spend you'd find that it was exactly the same. We have to change the cycles we're in. A few percentage points invested above that line could start to become game changing. Money invested in an infant will generate a happier, healthier and longer life. We know that a dollar spent in early childhood saves around \$17 of later government spend. We have to invest in parenting; in our young parents; our new mums and dads. Whatever it takes to purify a pregnancy generate attachment, bonding and brain growth, and create a happy healthy child with aspirations.

To do this, all of our services are going to have to work really well together. We're going to have to have the level of resource that we need. And we're going to have to have a culture that's supportive; that's nurturing; that facilitates engagement, with those hard-to-reach families and pregnancies that need us the most.

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The challenge to us all is not just one of protection from harm, but enabling hope and aspiration. Getting young people into education and work, would be great

✦ reducing access to alcohol, and cutting methamphetamines off at the borders is critical.

✦ sorting poverty in New Zealand's increasing gap between rich and poor is critical

✦ sorting housing is critical.

✦ having all New Zealand children become good at speaking maori would be a statement that this is valued and important, and doing so would be enriching for all of us.

When I talk to my friends about this they say this is a no-brainer. We cannot believe that a country as rich as we are does not accept the seriousness of its issues and treat so many of its children so poorly. Every month lost is a window of opportunity lost, for a child, for a family and for a country, for New Zealand

Lets spend our money, on parenting, not on prisons.

- Could we have a children's ministry with aspirations to sort this, and a responsibility to do so. a
- Could we have a children's minister that sits on a government front bench - ideally the finance minister. Treasury can help us to sort this.
- Can all the corporations and banks be legislated to have to give back to a country and the communities that they benefit from?
- Can we have a plan - a 10-yr plan for maternity

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for young people - for children? that crosses all the political boundaries and outlives the political cycle, beyond our 3 years.

When you go home, go and talk to your politicians make sure that they understand the seriousness of the issues and that THEY COMMIT to THE

SOLUTIONS

Take a look at your own community because there will be initiatives there that are part of the solution.

Its going to take an "all-of-country" approach to solve the first thousand days.

Give a bird feathers, the bird can then fly.

Thankyou