Introduction

The provision of responsive child welfare services that are able to meet the diverse needs of families and achieve meaningful outcomes continues to be a challenge for policy makers and practitioners around the globe (Featherstone, Broadhurst and Holt, 2011; Featherstone, Morris and White, 2013; Featherstone, White and Morris, 2014; Keddell, 2014). Tensions exist among politicians, policy makers and practitioners, who all have different perspectives on how best to respond to the changing needs of families who face multiple challenges. At the core of these debates is gaining agreement on the factors that contribute to good practice and are able to significantly enhance the well-being of families and children. Historical and current debates in child welfare provision focus on the assessment of risk and safety and the role of the state in the provision of care to vulnerable populations, including its relationships with nongovernmental organizations and informal support networks. Questions about child welfare provision are concerned with which services should be universally available to all families, and which services should be targeted and directed at families who are perceived to be the most at risk. These approaches are strongly aligned to political and economic ideologies that determine societal responses to risk and to need (Featherstone et al., 2014).

Child welfare provision must be also understood alongside intractable issues such as poverty. Policy responses to poverty and to other key challenges such as housing, education and health all have an impact on the nature of child welfare services and interventions.

This chapter explores the child welfare context in New Zealand and begins with a discussion of current international debates and perspectives on child welfare policy and services, before turning its attention to a discussion on the specific New Zealand context. We draw on findings from a study of vulnerable youth and their experiences of service use, having first introduced the study and present participants’ perspectives and experiences of child welfare services. The concluding section draws on these accounts and explores the factors that are likely to contribute to best practice in child welfare services.
International debates on child welfare policy and services

The provision of effective child welfare services in diverse global contexts continues to be a challenge for governments around the globe (Featherstone et al., 2014; Bywaters et al., 2015; Spolander, Engelbrecht and Pullen Sansfaçon, 2015). Policymakers and practitioners have struggled to adequately address harm and abuse in the context of wider issues. Central to the challenges faced by governments is building an understanding of the relationship between child welfare provision and structural issues such as poverty and access to health and education resources. Consideration also needs to be given to understanding the connections between political ideologies and welfare policy, and the impact these ideologies and policies have on the provision of support to families (Frost and Hoggett, 2008; Featherstone et al., 2014; Runswick-Cole and Goodley, 2015).

Pressure on resources in many jurisdictions has created a preoccupation with developing actuarial tools to assess risk and harm, and attention has been on resolving immediate and acute issues. Such approaches create assessment practices that promote short-term solutions without addressing the genesis and root causes of harm and abuse, such as contextual factors and the contribution of these factors to psychosocial challenges (Featherstone et al., 2014). A deeper analysis of these psychosocial challenges involves building an understanding of the lived experience of social suffering and the ‘damage inflicted in late capitalist societies on the least powerful’ (Frost and Hoggett, 2008, p. 440). For example, this social suffering and damage can be seen in the impact of neoliberal policies and the concomitant rising inequality alongside the eclipsing of the ‘moral imperatives of mutual obligation’ and the support of a welfare state (Featherstone et al., 2014, p. 22).

These political ideologies and policy regimes have, over several decades, had a profound influence on the nature of social work with children and families and, importantly for social workers, in the child welfare field. An enduring concern for social workers has been how to transform practice so that it achieves better outcomes for families. This involves a desire to move away from practice that is preoccupied with assessing risk to practice that builds an understanding of the contexts of family life, including how families negotiate the daily challenges of living in impoverished material circumstances and work to secure resources and well-being for their children. Tensions exist for social workers who are required to make difficult decisions within complex circumstances as they work to ensure the safety and well-being of children. This challenging practice requires compassion, an ability to balance the needs of children and parents, and a commitment to maintaining strong connections between children and their families (Featherstone et al., 2014, p. 5). It also requires social workers to understand the impacts of changing social policies, including using child-centred approaches that ensure that the best interests of the child are protected. In reality, such approaches may not always guarantee the best outcomes as through the desire to protect children from harm, important attachments with family members may be severed. This means that due recognition may not be given to the need to maintain connections with birth families nor for social workers to have the time, knowledge and skills to work to keep children safe and create stability while strengthening children’s connections with significant others in ways that are safe.

Effective child welfare practice, and meaningful work with children and families that achieves positive outcomes for both children and families, requires a focus on both the children’s needs and those of their families, including understanding the impact of living in poverty (Gupta, Featherstone and White, 2014). It requires that practitioners work well together and collaborate across service systems so that the needs of children and families remain at the forefront. However, in many jurisdictions, practice has been reduced to a series of standardized guidelines
and tasks in order to reduce costs and, as a consequence, professional discretion is undermined (Spolander et al., 2015). In turn, this restricts the capacity of social workers to engage in relational practice that enables them to build strong connections with clients and work across systems (Higgins, Goodyer and Whittaker, 2015). Given these challenges, the reviews of practice in the UK, and most recently the reviews by Munro, give some hope to social workers as they strive to uphold the ideals of relational practice and challenge the increasing bureaucratization of practice (Higgins et al., 2015). These reviews of practice in the UK, and in other jurisdictions, promote a different orientation to practice that underlines practice as complex and uncertain. In adopting this practice, social workers need to be supported to work within a framework of ethical integrity that moves from a narrow focus on ‘child protection’ to an expansive approach that facilitates relational practice which is responsive to the needs of children within the context of their families and networks of support (Higgins et al., 2015).

The New Zealand context: challenges in the provision of child welfare services

New Zealand faces the same challenges as other jurisdictions. In New Zealand, child welfare services are provided by a statutory organization, Child, Youth and Family (CYF), which has legislative responsibility for the care and protection of children and youth. This organization works closely with nongovernmental organizations and other statutory organizations (such as health and education) to ensure the safety of children and youth and to provide support for their families. While there is a statutory commitment to having children remain with their families, when there are significant care and protection concerns, children are placed in the custody of CYF who then facilitate a range of care options, including care within the extended family, foster care or care in group homes and residential facilities. The legislation (Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1989) allows for a continuum of care where a range of care and protection services are provided, ranging from prevention and early intervention through to crisis responses and statutory intervention (Office of the Children’s Commissioner, 2015).

As in other jurisdictions, child welfare services in New Zealand have in recent times undergone many reviews. Most recently, a ministerial review has called for an overhaul of services, including asking for more considered attention to be given to hearing the voices of children and young people (Ministry of Social Development, 2015). Of significance in the New Zealand child welfare system is being able to respond to the needs of Maori (indigenous people of New Zealand) children and their families, given the high number of Maori children and young people in care. In 1988, the publication of Puao-te-ata-tu exposed institutional racism in social service practice within the Department of Social Welfare (now CYF), and as a result, practices and procedures were put in place to address these issues and give voice to Maori staff and clients (Ministerial Advisory Committee, 1988). Many initiatives were implemented, such as the development of culturally responsive practice models, opportunities for practitioners to learn about cultural frameworks, changing practice imperatives such as involving families in decision making about their children, and a commitment to placing children with extended family members. Another watershed moment in the history of child welfare provision in New Zealand was the passing of the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1989. The Act enabled more active involvement of families in decision making. Practices such as family group conferences are evidence of the intention to involve the family and child in planning and intervention decisions. Despite the good intentions of the Act, and the introduction of innovative approaches to practice such as family group conferencing, child welfare practice still faces many challenges, and practice across New Zealand is variable (MSD, 2015).
Re-notification rates of abuse remain high and while the data suggest that the occurrence of neglect, physical and sexual abuse has remained steady, there has been a significant increase in the rates of emotional abuse and chronic need (MSD, 2015). The findings regarding chronic need are not surprising given the rising rates of poverty and inequality in New Zealand (OCC, 2015) and the impact of enduring disadvantage. Furthermore, the disadvantage experienced by Maori families is reflected in the number of Maori children who come to the attention of CYF (approximately 57 per cent of children five years and under coming to CYF attention are Maori, compared to 30 per cent in the general population), and this continues over time as Maori children are likely to experience many re-notifications and remain in the child welfare system in the longer term (MSD, 2015).

The child welfare system continues to struggle to both effectively respond to the needs of children and families and to improve well-being and outcomes of children in the care system (MSD, 2015). Importantly, there continues to be a reactive response to need, an inability to adequately respond to the complexity of chronic need and insufficient collaboration across the sector (MSD, 2015, p. 6). The challenges experienced internationally also apply in the New Zealand context (Beddoe, 2014; Beddoe and Harington, 2015). At the societal level, attention is focused on the connection between harm and abuse and poverty and inequality, and political ideologies determine how the state mechanisms will respond to these issues. Political ideologies also determine approaches to welfare provision; in New Zealand, as in many other jurisdictions, there is a mixed orientation to welfare provision (Keddell, 2014) and to approaches for supporting families – in particular those families where children are being raised in impoverished material circumstances. A child welfare orientation responds to contextual issues and offers ‘a broad-based prevention policy framework’ (Keddell, 2014, p. 71), while a child protection orientation adopts a narrow individual focus to determining what is in the best interests of the child. As discussed above, child protection approaches are likely to be associated with standardized assessment tools and mechanisms for quantifying risk. In contrast, broad-based welfare perspectives are likely to focus on relational practice that involves understanding the ecology of family life, and on building meaningful support relationships with children and families (Featherstone et al., 2014; Keddell, 2014). The debates about service provision in New Zealand will be ongoing: decisions will need to be made about how to repair a fractured welfare system and develop practice that remains focused on achieving better well-being outcomes for all children. In developing welfare practice, it is important that the voices of those who use welfare services are heard.

The perspectives of service users

A New Zealand study

This chapter draws on the findings of the qualitative phase of a New Zealand study that sought to understand the service experiences of young people (aged 13 to 17) across multiple services (child welfare, juvenile justice, education support and mental health) in five geographical locations. At the time of recruitment into the study, young people needed to be using two or more of these services. With regard to child welfare services, the young people and their families were involved with statutory care and protection services and some were also receiving support from nongovernmental organisations. Many of the young people had spent significant periods away from their birth families, including time in care and protection residences, in group homes and in foster care. While the goal of statutory agencies in this jurisdiction is to have children remain within the family network with support from nongovernmental organizations, this was not
possible for many of the young people and as a result they spent significant periods of time in
the care system. Data collection included a quantitative survey \((n = 605)\), the Pathways to Youth
Measure (PRYM) adapted from a validated instrument used in Canada (Sanders et al., 2013)
with young people, and a separate survey with a support person nominated by the youth. The
survey captured \textit{inter alia} demographic information, service use, experiences of risk, relationships
and networks and social and emotional resources. The study also included qualitative interviews
with a subsample of young people and a nominated support person (including parents, other
family members including older siblings, friends, practitioners including social workers and youth
workers), and this chapter draws on these interviews. The semi-structured interview schedule
captured the life experiences of the young person, and explored more deeply experiences over
their lifetime including those of family, school, community, services, informal support and
resources, relationships, harm, understanding of health and well-being, and their views on what
did, or what could, assist them in addressing their challenges and achieve their goals. In total,
109 young people and 76 nominated support people were interviewed. The mean age of the
young people was 15.1 years \((SD = 1.0)\), of whom 56 were male. The young people had been
clients of at least three of the service systems (statutory and nongovernmental services) and, at
the time of the interview, just over fifty percent were using child welfare services. Over half
\((n = 63, 57.8\%)\) self-identified as Maori, 28 (25.7\%) as Pacific (one of the largest migrant groups
in New Zealand), 14 (12.8\%) as Pakeha (white New Zealander/other European) and four (3.7\%)
identified as belonging to ‘other ethnicity’. Just over half (51\%) of the youth were living with
one or both birth parents, and just under half were living in secure facilities (child welfare or
juvenile justice residences), group homes, foster care, or adoptive situations. Many of the young
people had disrupted living circumstances and moved frequently (for example, between foster
care and birth parents).

Education experiences for many were also interrupted; over two-thirds (70\%) had stopped
attending or had been excluded from mainstream school by their second year of high school,
and while some had moved into alternative education settings, their attendance was often
intermittent.

The findings from the qualitative interviews generated important insights into how young
people made sense of their engagement with child welfare services, the barriers to effective service
use and what constituted successful service engagement with services. The next section presents
four thematic clusters that explore the service experiences of the young people and their
nominated support person: confusion about service engagement, inconsistent service encounters,
uncertain futures and meaningful service encounters.

**Key challenges: the perspectives of young people and their support person**

**Confusion about service engagement**

The young people in this study were often confused about the purpose of their engagement
with child welfare services. For instance, Anya (15) recounted that when she was removed from
her family, she did not know what the CYF (care and protection agency) was, and she felt that
there was not enough attention given to explaining why she had to be removed, where she
was going and what she could expect when she got there. As she explained: ‘When they take
kids off their parents or off anybody they should sit them down and talk to them and help them
understand’. Some young people reported that they did not remember the names of social
workers, and often did not know that it was a social worker who was visiting them. They
reported that the information provided was often unclear: people did not communicate in a way that the young person understood, nor did they check that the young person understood processes and the roles of key people, such as social workers and the lawyer for the child.

Several young people spoke of being confused about their placements in foster care, and felt that they were not adequately introduced to the foster parents. They felt it was a rushed process, and many felt sad and overwhelmed by the decisions being made on their behalf without adequate explanation. Moreover, some felt they had been put somewhere because it was convenient and was the only available place at the time. While they said that they knew about the pressure on resources, including social workers’ workloads, they felt that social workers could do more, even if it was by providing better explanations as to why decisions were being made. Some of the young people suggested that the foster home was not always an improvement on what they had experienced at home, as Anton (16) reported: ‘... I never really understood why they put me in that house, why put they put a kid there’. As a result of this confusion, many voted with their feet and ran away – some returned home while others stayed with friends or slept rough.

There were also comments, from both young people and their support person, about feeling overwhelmed at the family group conference (FGC), a process that was specifically designed to ensure that the voices of both young people and their families were heard and taken into account in plans and interventions. Young people and their support people identified that social workers and FGC coordinators did not always take the time to explain the processes, who would be involved and the role that the young person and their family would have in the FGC. This meant that at times decisions came as a surprise because the young person had not been well prepared for these. The young people and their support person outlined instances where plans were not followed up and confusion about whose responsibility it was to ensure that this occurred.

**Inconsistent service encounters**

The young people and their support person spoke of inconsistent service encounters. Statutory responses were experienced as reactive responses to acute episodes, such as removal from an abusive and harmful situation that was then often not followed up by a sustained intervention that was focused on preventing the situation from recurring. Pania (parent) had removed her daughter from a harmful situation at her father’s house (substance abuse), but felt that after the initial incident they were not well supported by services: ‘you know they were supposed to come but it was like she got lost in the system ... she was supposed to go to counselling, that never happened ... they just get so busy’. Latoya (14) had been involved with child welfare services from an early age and told a similar story. She felt that the social worker came (usually a different one each time) when she was being naughty, but didn’t always follow up with agreed tasks – for example, helping her get back into school. Anton (16) spoke of social workers being inconsistent in following up on practical tasks, such as helping him sign up for a course. He felt that he missed out on many opportunities because the ‘paperwork wasn’t done’.

Inconsistent service encounters were also seen in young people’s experience of foster care. Placement breakdown was common for these young people. Loretta (15) talked of emergency foster care placements and the difficulty the social worker had in finding her a permanent placement. Alani (15) also experienced challenges in foster care: he was taken from his mum and put in the care of a grandparent, but there was irregular monitoring of this and he ended up going back and forth to his mum’s house – a place to which those at the FGC agreed he would not return.
For many young people, inconsistent service experience was seen in inadequate responses to their needs and also in broken promises — that is, adults not following through on decisions and plans. Casey (16) felt that her problems (neglect and abuse) should have been dealt with earlier. She said that, by the time she got to the FGC, she didn’t care any more as she was so angry about her situation. She felt that if things had been dealt with earlier, ‘worse problems’ may have been prevented. Young people talked of broken promises and this meant that many did not trust their social workers. Chelsea (16) said she gave up thinking that anything positive would happen for her as she was ‘let down’ too many times, and consequently found it hard to believe people when they said they would ‘help her out’. She said it was difficult to trust social workers as she had been ‘let down’ too many times. This was also the case for Meha (15), whose worker did not make regular visits. When Meha confronted her about this, the social worker said that because Meha was doing ‘okay’ she didn’t think she needed to make regular visits. Meha was not impressed with this explanation, as what he needed was a trusted adult he could discuss his concerns with, and he assumed that because he was under CYF care that this would be his social worker.

Changes in social workers also resulted in inconsistent service responses. Mariana (15) had many changes of social worker and, because information did not appear to be passed on between social workers, she had to continually repeat her story. She said that it wasn’t until she had a social worker that stayed with her for more than a few weeks that she felt listened to and that things started to change for the better. Derek, a grandfather, felt the same way. He said that too many changes in social workers resulted in poor communication, not only between social workers and with families, but also across services — for example, between child welfare and mental health services. It also resulted in constant changes in goals, plans and interventions.

Uncertain futures

Many of the young people spoke about their engagement with services as having the potential to change their circumstances and to open up new opportunities. However, for many this did not eventuate. Despite long periods in multiple services, the majority in this study still had uncertain futures. Of importance was not being able to dream and have hope for a positive future. They talked of not thinking about the future as they needed to focus on getting through each day. Some felt angry when asked about what they thought the future may look like, because it reminded them of missed opportunities. Of importance was disrupted education experiences, and many had regrets about not being supported to re-engage in learning. Many young people felt that social workers could have worked harder to get them back into school. This was reiterated in the interviews with the support people, who recounted that, at times, social workers actually undermined education opportunities by placing children in foster homes that required changes in schools, or by failing to advocate for a return to school when young people were excluded. Moreover, clinical appointments and therapeutic programmes often occurred during school hours which interrupted school attendance. When young people do not complete education, future opportunities are compromised.

Another factor that resulted in uncertain futures for young people was being discharged from child welfare services at aged 17 (the mandated age of discharge from child welfare services). As Ariana (17) shared: ‘Then as soon as you turn 17 you are out. You know. No support no nothing’. And as Derek (grandfather) said: ‘Things worked when she was at (residential programme) and then she was discharged and things fell apart’. This abrupt departure from care undermined the potential of social workers to provide meaningful and effective support to young people and their families.
Meaningful service encounters

When social workers were able to provide meaningful service encounters, young people became more hopeful about their future. Young people reported on the elements that constituted these meaningful service encounters. When they were able to form trusted relationships with their social workers, opportunities opened up for them. In the current study, over half of the young people \( (n = 63, \ 57.8\%) \) self-identified as Maori, and so for some of these young people having social workers who enabled them to explore their identity and connecting them back with their cultural networks was a key element of meaningful support. For example, Loretta (15) had disrupted relationships with her immediate family, so appreciated that her residential key worker located extended family members from her iwi (tribe) who could tell her about her whakapapa (family connections) and who could become part of her support network. Being able to maintain connections with family members, no matter how challenging these relationships were, was important to these young people, as it contributed to being able to develop a strong sense of self.

Other young people described being able to form a strong connection with their social worker as a key element in meaningful support; these young people trusted their social worker, and appreciated that they ‘could talk to them about anything’ (Anya, 15). These social workers listened to young people, respected their views and cared about them. Young people also appreciated it when their social worker was honest with them, kept them informed of what was going to happen and involved them in decision making. As Anya said: ‘they are the ones you want on your side’. Honesty was important to these young people and they appreciated it when social workers were ‘straight up, instead of trying to do the “I will see” . . . instead of trying to lie to you and keep your hopes up waiting for ages and it’s not even gunna happen’ (Victor, 16). Falia (14) also appreciated that her social worker was able to talk about difficult issues and said that she was ‘what a social worker is meant to be, she relates to me, she talks to me . . . so I was becoming more aware of what I was doing’.

Young people and their support person identified the importance of having social workers who were qualified in social work with young people and understood their issues and circumstances. This included having social workers who took the time to understand their behaviour and actions. They wanted social workers to know that they were more than the labels they were given, and that many of their actions were about trying to find ways to keep themselves safe and seek out resources and support. Ross (17) said he appreciated this understanding from his social worker, who not only understood his behaviour but also facilitated access to specialized support so he could deal with his anger issues. Mariana (15) shared a similar story, where she not only appreciated her social worker’s understanding but also that she completed ‘what she says she’s going to do’. Young people and their support person also identified ‘good’ social workers as those who provided both emotional and practical support. As Gerard (16) said: ‘I liked the way he talked to me and set out all the goals that I wanted to do, and then he helped me get into (name of an agency)’.

The accounts of the young people and their support person provide important insights into what responsive child welfare practice looks like.

Developing responsive child welfare practice

As with the experiences of international jurisdictions, New Zealand faces major challenges in the delivery of child welfare services. Research and accounts from service users expose a fractured welfare system where users experience inconsistent service encounters. The accounts from the
young people and their support people indicated that practice was characterized by episodic responses to acute instances of harm and abuse, and therefore interventions were unable to address chronic issues. Current orientations to child welfare practice do not provide scope for sustained responses to the chronic and enduring issues that are associated with living in impoverished material circumstances (OCC, 2015). A focus on ‘front-end processes’ (OCC, 2015, p. 6) and immediate responses to keep children and young people safe do not always translate into ongoing support that has the potential to transform the circumstances of young people and achieve better outcomes in the longer term.

When families come into contact with child welfare services they should be better off, but this is not always the case (OCC, 2015). Engagement with services should have the potential to generate new opportunities and improve outcomes for children and families. However, as the accounts in the current study indicated, this does always occur: the young people reported confusion over service engagement, inconsistent interventions and often no improvement in their life circumstances. Young people experienced service encounters that involved ‘repeated short-term interventions’ (Featherstone et al., 2014, p. 137), with frequent changes to social workers, which meant that they had difficulty trusting that services would actually improve their circumstances.

The research and reviews on child welfare practice provide a critique of current practice, and also identify the key elements of responsive and effective child welfare practice. Of importance is a broad-based approach to the needs of families and children who come to the attention of welfare services (Keddell, 2014). This approach enables a deeper understanding of the contexts of family life, the relationship between abuse and harm and structural issues (Featherstone et al., 2014), and an understanding of the impact of material disadvantage on family life. At the organizational level, it requires investigating the nature of service encounters and accepting that it is likely that families will show hostility to a system that has not been responsive in the past, and that has failed to help them address their issues and achieve positive outcomes (Featherstone et al., 2014; OCC, 2015).

Research has indicated that when practice moves away from a ‘bureaucratically-oriented focus’ (Higgins et al., 2015, p. 333) to a focus on working with complexity and recognition ‘that risk needs to be understood and managed within the context of human relationships’ (ibid., p. 337), new possibilities emerge. Relationship-based social work (Ruch, Turney and Ward, 2010) has much to offer child welfare practice, because it enables social workers to understand how to establish trust-based relationships with families in order to work on complex issues. For the young people in the current study, positive relationships with social workers generated opportunities to extend their social capital (Barker & Thomson, 2015); for example, social workers were able to facilitate access to social networks and resources such as support to return to school. These opportunities enabled young people to experience the ordinary experiences that other young people may take for granted – for example, participation in school and cultural and sporting activities, which had the potential to contribute to better long-term outcomes for these young people (Agee and Dickinson, 2008; Yao, Deane and Bullen, 2015).

A cornerstone of relationship-based approaches is positioning families and children at the centre of decision making on plans and interventions. Respect and authenticity are a foundation for the active participation of families in decision-making processes. Encouraging active participation requires that social workers take the time to understand the lived experiences of families and to adopt practice approaches that draw on the resources and capacities that families bring to helping relationships. The young people’s accounts in the current study identified the importance of being involved in decisions, and this included open communication where they felt heard and where processes were clearly explained to them. This has been called ‘walking
it together’ (Schmied and Walsh, 2010, p. 168), where social workers learn about young people’s circumstances and how young people themselves make sense of their experiences. Seeking out these first-hand accounts from young people enables social workers to establish genuine and authentic relationships, and demonstrate that they care about young people and are willing to work alongside them to resolve the issues they confront. This respectful practice is also future-focused, where social workers do not only address immediate issues but support young people to expand opportunities that will enable them to make plans for the future (Agnew, 2015). Such an approach involves strengthening young people’s support networks and resources. This is especially important when young people leave care, as these strengthened networks have a vital role to play in supporting the transition from care. To be effective, transition plans need to be monitored and regularly reviewed to ensure that support for the young person remains in place, and that they are able to achieve their short- and long-term goals.

Working to ensure that young people remain connected to place and to family is a key foundation of responsive welfare practice (Higgins et al., 2015). Young people’s accounts demonstrated the importance of maintaining connections with family members, even when these family relationships were difficult and challenging. It also involves supporting young people to maintain a sense of place, including knowing where they are from and the important connections in their families and communities. This includes maintaining connections with extended family members and with cultural networks.

Finally, if child welfare practice is to move away from a narrow focus on ‘child protection’ to an expansive orientation that facilitates relational practice (Higgins et al., 2015), it requires that social workers are well qualified and supported. It also involves collaboration between professionals across sectors (such as health and education) who are prepared to work together to enhance the well-being outcomes of children and young people.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored child welfare services in New Zealand. It discussed these services in the context of international debates, and identified some of the key developments in child welfare practice in New Zealand. Drawing on a current study of young people who have been users of child welfare services, it identified the factors that contribute to best practice in child welfare. Central to developing responsive child welfare practice is keeping children and families at the centre of decision making and an orientation to practice that not only focuses on the immediate and the acute, but that also adopts broad-based approaches that have the potential to transform the current circumstances of children and young people so that they can realize different futures.

**References**


