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Implementing Working for Families: the impact of the policy on selected Māori whānau

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This paper presents an analysis of the qualitative data collected for a study investigating the effect of the Working for Families policy on Māori families' self-reported whānau ora (family wellbeing). Data are drawn from a discrete set of 30 qualitative interviews undertaken with Māori whānau involved in the Te Hoe Nuku Roa Longitudinal Study. Whānau perceptions about how the Working for Families policy has impacted on their lives and the contribution the policy has made towards their family's wellbeing is presented. The paper discusses how the Working for Families policy appears to have become an integral component of household income for many low-to-middle-income whānau and reflects on how this policy, conceived and designed (amongst other things) to alleviate and redress child poverty, is contributing towards supporting family wellbeing or 'whānau ora'.

Keywords: Māori; whānau; family; social policy; wellbeing

Introduction

The Working for Families (WFF) policy introduced in the 2004 Budget, signalled a significant change in how, and to whom, welfare distribution would occur in New Zealand. At the time, WFF formed part of the then-Labour government's broader Reducing Inequalities Framework which was a policy platform comprising a broad range of initiatives across the whole of government aimed at improving the social and economic wellbeing of disadvantaged populations, including Māori (Office of the Minister for Social Development and Employment 2003). Working for Families, as it was originally conceived, sought to address a number of social policy goals namely: to reduce child poverty; to improve the incomes of working families; to strengthen work incentives for unemployed

parents; and to make it easier for families to access financial assistance (Johnson 2005). Elements of the policy include a range of tax credits for low-to-middle-income families, assistance with childcare costs and housing subsidies (Ministry of Social Development 2008).

In 2009, Whakauae Research for Māori Health and Development Research embarked on a three-year study (*Reducing inequalities: Analysing the Effect of Government Policy on Whānau Ora*) to explore the impact of the Working for Families policy on Māori whānau ora, or family wellbeing. This paper presents preliminary findings from qualitative interview data with Māori whānau who have been in receipt of Working for Families tax credits and/or other components of the policy. Three key themes are reported and discussed: how

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Working for Families support was received and used by the whānau; the impact that receiving Working for Families support had on these whānau; and the link, if any, between the financial assistance they received from Working for Families and ‘whānau ora’, where the concept of whānau ora was defined by each family.

Background

In the late twentieth and early twenty-firstst centuries, the New Zealand government concluded that a coordinated and collaborative effort on its part was required to reduce persistent social and economic inequalities between Māori and non-Māori (Ministry of Health 2002a). These efforts were, until recently, conducted under the Reducing Inequalities Framework, a policy platform which sought to improve the social and economic wellbeing of Māori, Pacific people and other disadvantaged populations (Office of the Minister for Social Development and Employment 2003). Working for Families comprises a package or ‘suite’ of social welfare benefits. It targets low-to-middle-income families with dependent children (Perry 2004) with the aim of providing incentives to those families to participate in the paid workforce and, by extension, contribute to a reduction in child poverty (True 2005). An important feature of the policy is its focus on tax-based assistance through a system of tax credits (Johnson 2005). Components of the policy include increasing family incomes, making work pay, assisting with childcare costs and providing more affordable housing for families (Ministry of Social Development 2008).

In addition to employing social welfare policies such as WFF to address inequalities, the government’s objectives in this regard have been clearly articulated through a range of health strategy documents, including the New Zealand Health Strategy (Ministry of Health 2002a), the Primary Health Care Strategy (Ministry of Health 2001) and the Māori Health Strategy: He Korowai Oranga (Ministry of Health 2002b). The government’s overall

goal for Māori health, as outlined in the Māori Health Strategy He Korowai Oranga, is the achievement of whānau ora or Māori families supported to achieve their maximum health and wellbeing (Ministry of Health 2002b). Whānau ora is also an important vision for Māori themselves, capturing both the sense that collective effort is required to improve health and social wellbeing and that understandings of wellbeing must be grounded within a Māori worldview.

Some nine years since its introduction, the concept of whānau ora is now firmly entrenched in the health sector. With the establishment by Cabinet in June 2009 of the Taskforce on Whānau-Centred Initiatives (Turia 2010), a budget appropriation in 2010 to support this initiative, and the selection of an initial group of Whānau Ora Providers who must be ready to deliver a programme of action in 2011 (Te Puni Kōkiri 2010), the application of the concept is spreading into the human and social service fields more broadly. However, measuring whānau ora and whānau ora outcomes, particularly in health, has proved both an analytical and practical problem for researchers, policymakers and funders alike. In part, this is due to the lack of a single, consistent and globally understood definition of whānau ora, not just amongst those who make policy and those charged with implementing policy, but also amongst health and social service providers themselves. The ultimate objective of this research project is to make a determination as to whether the Working for Families policy, a key element of the broader Reducing Inequalities Framework, has contributed towards achieving the government’s stated goal in Māori health—whānau ora.

Researchers and those who fund research have both identified the need for more systematic monitoring of the impact of social policy (Blaiklock et al. 2002; Devlin et al. 2001). This study derives from an RFP released by two research funders: the Health Research Council of New Zealand and the Foundation for Research Science and Technology. The funders

specifically sought ‘whānau ora’ research that would address multiple indicators of Māori social and health inequality; contribute to an improved understanding of the interrelated causes; and identify potential approaches to addressing these inequalities. In response, this study intends to contribute to our understanding of the impact of government policy on whānau ora by tracking Māori household economic and other social indicators over time and in relation to the introduction of the Working for Families policy. While the research team recognize that evaluation of the WFF policy has been the focus of research (Bryson et al. 2007; Evans et al. 2007; Wehi-peihana & Pipi 2008), to our knowledge, this is the first time research is being undertaken which specifically investigates the links between WFF and whānau ora outcomes.

Methods

The research design for the full three-year study adopts a mixed methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods (Cresswell 2009). The study comprises four discrete phases of data collection activities: interviews with key informants regarding the intent and expected target audience for the policy (Boulton & Gifford 2010); identifying all households in the longitudinal survey, Te Hoe Nuku Roa, who qualify for the WFF; analysis of these households over time to assess how their whānau wellbeing has changed since the introduction of the policy; and interviews with a subset of these households to gather in-depth data on their understanding of the policy and its perceived effects on their whānau wellbeing. The findings presented here derive from this fourth phase of data collection: the whānau interviews conducted with the subset of Te Hoe Nuku Roa households who were identified as being eligible to receive Working for Families.

Te Hoe Nuku Roa (THNR) is the longest-running longitudinal survey of Māori households, originally designed to provide an on-going socio-cultural-demographic profile of

Māori households, whānau and individuals. The study design is described elsewhere (Durie 1995; Te Hoe Nuku Roa Research Team 1997, 1999, 2000) and comprises a survey using a random sample of 850 Māori households (roughly 2500 individuals) across seven Regional Council areas currently: Northland, Auckland, Gisborne, Manawatu/Whanganui, Wellington, Nelson/Marlborough and Southland.

The survey follows the same people/households over time, returning to interview them at 3–5-year intervals for as long as they’re willing to participate. The ‘wave’ concept clusters all the first interviews together as Wave 1, the second as Wave 2 and so on, even if the total wave is completed over an extended period of time. The initial survey (Wave 1) began late in 1995. Te Hoe Nuku Roa adds new people to the sample if they join a household already in the survey and may add extra (totally new) households and regions over time as well. For example, the Northland and Southland regions were added in Wave 4 and Nelson/Marlborough in Wave 5.

The tool used for the first four sampling waves was an omnibus survey which asked a broad range of questions on lifestyle, culture, te reo Māori, education, health, income, employment and household composition. The Wave 4 questionnaire added detailed questions on whānau membership and interaction dynamics, as well as the addition of an Economic Living Standards Indicator (Jensen et al. 2002) which had been developed through collaboration with the Ministry for Social Development (Cunningham et al. 2002). The survey itself is undertaken through face-to-face interviews. The dataset is held at the Research Centre for Māori Health and Development, Massey University.

To find a sample of families to interview for the WFF study, the research team identified all the households in the THNR dataset whose characteristics qualified them to receive WFF. The literature review and key informant interviews conducted prior to this phase informed the team’s understanding of the types of whānau targeted by the Working for Families policy.

Using this knowledge, the research team worked with a statistician from the Research Centre for Māori Health and Development to interrogate the dataset to determine the households likely to be in receipt of Working for Families.

Households were therefore selected on the following basis:

- At least one child born after mid-1993 (i.e. still under 18 years of age during 2010–11 Wave 5 sample period);
- At least one adult from the household interviewed prior to the introduction of WFF, as only the adults answer the household and other relevant questions (e.g. income) that provide the background on the household for the survey; and
- All household interviews were completed prior to 1 April 2005, the implementation date of WFF.

Of the 615 households in Wave 4, where at least one adult responded to the economic questions, approximately half the households were excluded as the THNR interviews had been administered after the main WFF introduction date (1 April 2005). To ensure there was child of eligible age in the household (i.e. a child who would still be under 18 during the 2010–11, Wave 5 sample period), we selected only those households where an eligible-age child questionnaire had been completed. This further reduced our potential sample to some 72 households. Of these households, 62 were selected as being most likely to meet WFF criteria. Once eligible households were identified, the research team contacted each household to confirm whether they did, in fact, receive Working for Families support and were willing to participate in a face-to-face interview. The final sample for the qualitative component of the study therefore comprises some 42 households.

The 30 whānau interviews reported here were conducted by five interviewers using a semi-structured interview schedule developed by the research team. Interviews could include

as many whānau members as the whānau determined necessary, although the majority of interviews were only conducted with the mother of the family. Interviews occurred between October 2010 and December 2010 and ranged between 10 minutes and 40 minutes in length. A further 12 interviews are planned for February 2011, which will conclude the qualitative interviewing component of the study. Each interview was recorded and transcribed and an inductive thematic analysis completed by the members of the research team (Cresswell 2009). Ethical approval for the entire project was granted by the Multi-region Ethics Committee.

Limitations

The findings reported here must be considered in light of the study's more general limitations. The whānau had to meet a range of criteria including still being in receipt of Working for Families support, and having at least one child who would be aged 18 years or younger during the 2010–11 (Wave 5) data collection period. This requirement meant a number of families from the THNR study were ineligible for the study, as the youngest child has to be under the age of 13 in Wave 4 to be still eligible in Wave 5. Consequently, our interview sample could be biased towards those families with only older children. The final sample of 42 whānau represents approximately 13% of the total Wave 4 households with children aged 18 years or younger.

The households themselves are likely to be more aware of their socio-economic and cultural wellbeing, by virtue of the fact that they have been involved with the longitudinal study for some years. A further limitation is the use of households in the THNR study as proxies for whānau. While researchers are currently exploring the utility of using the terms household and whānau interchangeably (Tomlins-Jahnke & Durie 2008), for the purposes of this study, we have deliberately chosen to consider the households as whānau

in our analysis. Typically a THNR household comprises one family or group of people related to each other through marriage (conventional and common-law) and whakapapa. The whānau we interviewed therefore, may comprise examples of single-parent, blended, nuclear and non-nuclear family reflecting the great diversity apparent in contemporary Māori society (Durie 1998). It must also be noted that in these interviews, 'whānau ora' was defined by each individual whānau, thus the concept of whānau ora may differ between the whānau who participated in this part of the project and indeed differ from whānau who are not part of this study or the THNR longitudinal survey.

Findings

Preliminary findings from a thematic analysis of our interview data with whānau are presented below. Three themes in particular are explored: how additional income was received and used by the whānau; the impact, if any, that receiving Working for Families support had on these whānau; and whether the participants considered there was a link between the financial assistance they received from WFF and 'whānau ora'—a term which was defined by the whānau themselves. Findings are illustrated by quotes from the participants who are represented by codes. For example, the code WM1A refers to a whānau member (WM) in the first (1) household, with the letters A, B, C, etc distinguishing them from other whānau members who participated in the interview.

How the additional income was received and used

According to the policy, and depending on what components of Working for Families whānau are eligible to receive, WFF payments can be made on a weekly or fortnightly basis or families can opt to receive one lump sum payment at the end of the financial year. Whānau that we interviewed, therefore, re-

ceived their WFF payments in a range of ways, as best fitted the circumstances of their particular family. Most of the whānau we spoke to opted to receive payments weekly or fortnightly. The families that chose this option tended to use the additional income in one of two ways. Either the money was 'pooled' and used to pay bills or expenses the family incurred during the week, or the money was kept separate from the household accounts and used specifically for the children in that whānau. Those that combined their support payments with other weekly family income spoke of using the money to pay for everyday 'core' items, such as food and other groceries, rent/mortgage payments and power.

Interviewer: And what kind of thing does that usually go towards helping?

WM3A: Oh, just everything really. It just goes in to the bank account and just gets pooled together with everything else. Probably it's more bills, you know, the rent, and food at the moment, I suppose. 'Cos everything else comes out of my wages.

A small number of families spoke of using the additional money for 'luxuries', which may have included takeaway meals, a family trip or excursion or 'splashing out' on a birthday party or gifts for whānau.

Interviewer: And how is any additional income being used? You said it's mostly for food?

WM7A: Well, yeah. Yep, it does, yep. Or it will give us luxuries or something, but mainly, yeah.

Interviewer: What would a luxury be?

WM7A: Um, takeaways.

Interviewer: Okay. Like McDonalds or something?

WM7A: Yep, yep.

WM22A: We don't smoke or drink or nothing like that so we, you know, it doesn't get used for a party on Saturday night, on Friday night. Not that I'm hassling any of my whānau out there, but, yeah. Basically we don't live extravagantly

unless it's the kid's birthdays and then you sort of spend more money than you'd planned, but yeah.

The whānau that kept the support payments separate from the household income, earmarking it specifically for expenses related to their children, used their WFF payments primarily to pay for a range of school and education-related activities such as school uniforms, fees, sports and field trips, extra tuition and even school lunches.

Interviewer: The kinds of things that it goes towards every week? Does it go towards anything in particular?

WM6A: That money that comes straight to me, I use for the kids at school. So it goes in to things like school fees and everything surrounding school fees.

Interviewer: Does it ever go towards housing or like, mortgage or keeping the house warm or maintenance on the house or anything like that?

WM4A: No. I have a payment which goes in to the children's bank accounts . . . each fortnight. So that goes into there and basically at the beginning of the year when they need to get all their books and their school uniforms, and . . . yeah.

Some whānau chose to receive their WFF entitlement as a lump sum at the end of the tax year. Often the families that chose this option did so to ensure that the money they received was what they were entitled to, rather than facing a situation of being overpaid, and therefore having to pay money back to the IRD. These families used the lump sum payments in a variety of ways: to pay off debt (including credit card debt) that had accrued through the year; to pay the following year's council rates; and, in some instances, to pay for family holidays.

Interviewer: Do you know around about how much you get at the end of the year?

WM27A: Yep. Well what I got this year was four thousand, nine hundred. Yeah. For the year.

Interviewer: And what kind of things does it go . . . towards helping out with?

WM27A: Oh, well it goes on a trip for her [daughter] and I. Helps pay bills. Certainly around Christmas time. Rates and every household thing, shopping, food. So that helps me out, because I also get a job which helps pay my mortgage. So, mmmm, it came in quite handy.

Impact

For the majority of participants, receiving WFF assistance made a significant, and positive, impact on their family. Most of the families we interviewed received an additional \$60–300 dollars per week in their household budget as a consequence of receiving WFF support. Lump sum payments were in the order of between \$4000 and \$6000 per year. The families we interviewed spoke of the additional income as enabling them to 'survive' and to not have to 'struggle' quite so much to make ends meet. One whānau member noted 'I don't know where we would be today if we didn't get it' (WM24A). Another participant noted that, in their view: 'Working for Families income, yeah, I think it has saved a lot of people' (WM30A).

Interviewer: How do you reckon you guys would cope without that top up money?

WM10A: Probably wouldn't. Yeah.

Interviewer: What things would you have to sacrifice if you didn't have it, do you reckon?

WM10A: Uh, food. Cos that's all we spend our money on, is food. I have no bills. I only have one loan with the bank. I have no plastic cards or anything and most of our money is groceries. We've got three teenage daughters.

Interviewer: Who eat a lot.

WM10A: Who eat a lot. And a son and a little five month old baby.

WM11A: The difference it has made is like with being, well a big huge change for me this year is going down to one wage, it's like, I probably wouldn't survive and I'd probably lose my home if I wasn't get that bit of extra.

Others spoke about the opportunities the additional money afforded the children of low-income families. For instance, some talked about using WFF money to pay for extra tuition, sports and music lessons, thus ensuring their children received all the advantages of a well-rounded education. Still others spoke about the WFF support allowing one parent to stay at home and raise their children, without having financial worry or stress.

For at least two whānau, however, the impact of receiving Working for Families payments had made a negative impact overall as they had been, or were currently, in the position of having been 'overpaid' their entitlement and consequently had to pay back this debt to the IRD.

Interviewer: I'm just interested about when you had the accident and couldn't work anymore, did you go on to the IRD site and let them know or anything like that? Did you realise, did you do anything like that?

WM2A: No I didn't realise that was what you were supposed to do. You just, cos they, cos they would have known, would have seen it from my work when it would have stopped cos that's how they calculate a lot of the stuff anyway, regardless of you telling them or not.

Interviewer: Okay. So like that year...you couldn't work, did you get extra at the end of that tax year to make up for that shortfall when you weren't working?

WM2A: No, no I didn't. No, what happened was they...calculated wrongly...and...we're in arrears for a grand...two grand this year I owe them now.

Only three whānau indicated that the Working for Families policy had not made an impact on their family circumstances, either because the additional income they received was negligible as they had relatively high incomes, or because they had a great deal of personal debt and therefore still struggled financially.

Links between receiving WFF payments and whānau ora

To determine whether whānau considered that there was a link between the extra income they received from WFF and an improvement in their family's wellbeing, or whānau ora, we first outlined a definition of whānau ora derived from the literature and then asked whānau to describe what whānau ora meant for them. Our initial interviews indicated that, even when a definition was provided, families found it difficult to articulate what whānau ora meant for them. Consequently, we added a prompt question to our subsequent interviews, which was 'If everything was going well in your whānau what would that look like and what would be happening?' For those who were able to define whānau ora for their family, many noted that whānau ora was about having a happy, healthy family and being financially secure.

Interviewer: What would your idea of Whānau Ora be? If anything was going really well in the whānau, what would it look like for you?

WM9A: Oh, I guess I think of Mason's [Whare] Tapa Whā, you know? All those aspects being taken care of. Yeah, kids happy, kids clothed, fed, sheltered, warm, all that stuff. All those things being taken care of without it being ah...worrying about paying for the heating bill and all that stuff.

For other families, while financial security was important, they also emphasized the need for the parents to remain physically well, to not have to see a General Practitioner as often and for the household to be free of violence and abuse. For others, whānau ora was less concerned with physical or financial security and more about the cultural and spiritual wellbeing of the whānau. Yet other families emphasized the ability to live as a collective, to share good fortune and the ability to actively participate in the wider community.

While the responses to the question 'what constitutes whānau ora for your family' were

very diverse, we found that most of the whānau were in agreement that the WFF support they received did in fact contribute to their family's whānau ora.

Interviewer: And so when you think about Whānau Ora do you think that Working For Families contributes to Whānau Ora for you guys?

WM26B: For us, yes. It's kept us afloat.

Interviewer: How has Working For Families helped your whānau towards your definition of Whānau Ora?

WM22A: I guess, you know, if I wasn't able to pay my bills, if I wasn't able to, put food on the table, put clothes on their back and things like that then we, you know, wouldn't be able to have the other things. Being able to, to get by. Like if I wasn't able to put shoes on my feet so they can go off to school, they wouldn't be going to school so then I'd have them being truant and you know? You do have to meet your basic needs so that other things can happen . . . you know, is there gas in the car so when it's raining you can drop the kids off instead of them walking in the rain and getting a cold. You know, [that] one that said, in there about having, getting, being in a warmer home?

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

WM22A: Well, you know, if you don't have the money to pay the power bill, you know, to pay for your heating or whatever, you end up with sick kids. So, sick kids are hungry 'cos there is no food to eat for lunch or breakfast. It's all, yeah, it's all connected. If you can't meet your basic needs, then you can't, can't get by.

Only three families noted that the WFF support they received did not contribute to whānau ora for their whānau. One noted that, while the extra support they received from WFF payments had not been 'detrimental', when considering the contribution this support had made to their whānau ora, they were clear that 'it hasn't impacted on us in any way' (WM1A). The second whānau indicated that there was no connection between 'making ends

meet' and their personal definition of whānau ora (WM19A). A third noted that for them, whānau ora was not achieved through having a better income, explaining

WM12A: I don't think money should make a huge difference, I mean make a huge impact on Whānau Ora anyway, you know? It's a spiritual thing, not a money thing. Depends how you look at it I suppose. You know, they could be happy outside playing with a ball or if you want to spend so much money and take them to the A&P show, depends what you think happy is.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So for you it's not to do with money?

WM12A: No, not hugely. They don't have a lot of money and they're happy the way they are.

Discussion

New Zealand has a long history of social welfare assistance and of providing a 'safety net' for the poorest and most vulnerable within society. Furthermore, as a so-called developed country, there is great pride taken in New Zealand's position as one of the more socially advanced and economically wealthy of nation-states.

The conviction that many possess regarding the level of national prosperity belies the evidence that economic inequalities exist between groups within society, and that these same groups face economic hardship and indeed poverty on a day-to-day basis. A desire for more sophisticated understandings of the term 'poverty' has paved the way for the development of indicators to better measure the material circumstances of populations. In New Zealand, material hardship or deprivation is a measure of relative disadvantage. A person is understood to be experiencing material hardship or deprivation when they are 'excluded from the minimum acceptable way of life in their own society because of inadequate resources' (Perry 2009, p. 11).

Material hardship rates vary between sub-populations. Preliminary analysis from 2009 New Zealand Living Standards Survey

indicates that Māori and Pacific people have material hardship rates some two to three times those of European or 'Other' groups and that beneficiary families with dependent children have a hardship rate of around five times that for working families with children (50% and 11%, respectively) (Perry 2009). Results from the 2008 survey show that while material hardship rates have improved for all children between the 2004 and 2008 survey periods, as a consequence of the extra WFF support received by working families with dependent children and the increased employment, overall, children are still significantly over-represented in those experiencing hardship. Furthermore, of all children identified as being in a state of material hardship, approximately half come from working families (Perry 2009).

The Working for Families package was welcomed as the first major redistribution of income in favour of poorer New Zealanders in 30 years and, for the majority of families in our sample, was regarded as essential to meeting the shortfall between salary or wages and household expenses. The additional income families receive from Working for Families forms a vital part of their core income. Families who participated in this study indicated that without the additional support, they would find it difficult to manage household expenses on a week-to-week basis. We found a difference between those who chose to receive their WFF payments on a weekly or fortnightly basis, compared with those who opted for a lump sum at the end of the tax year. Those who chose the latter form of payment spoke about wanting to be sure the money they received was what they were entitled to, and of the real pressure it would put on their family if they had to reimburse the government for any overpayment. A clear impression from the research undertaken so far is that there is a distinct group of whānau with little or no discretionary income and who, as a whānau, would experience huge stress and anxiety were they to receive an additional, unplanned or unexpected bill.

Only a few whānau used the support payments to pay for so-called 'luxuries' and it is important to note the scale of these luxuries which, for most, was simply a take-away meal for the whānau or the ability to buy birthday presents, whether for their children or their children's friends. Only a small number of families were able to save a proportion of their support payments and those who did so, used these savings to pay for a family holiday, family excursion or similar family-based event.

Most whānau indicated that receiving WFF had made a very positive impact on the family and on the parent or parents' ability, to provide the necessities that would contribute towards their family's overall health and wellbeing: stable and 'healthy' housing; healthy food such as fresh meat and vegetables; and educational opportunities, including additional money for school fees, but also for field trips, sports and extra-curricular activities. For these whānau, it was important that their children were given as many opportunities as any of their peers, that they were well fed and clothed and that they were able to participate in a range of school-based and sporting activities.

Many families noted that the opportunities to participate in family and community-based activities was a direct consequence of receiving WFF support and that these opportunities, in turn, contributed to the families overall wellbeing. The term, whānau ora, was described and understood in a variety of ways, reflecting wider societal and indeed, political understandings of the term. In general, families agreed that whānau ora was achieved when the family was happy, healthy and financially secure. Financial security did not necessarily mean that a family had to be wealthy but rather that existing bills could be paid on time and unplanned expenses could be met. Almost all of the participants stated that the additional income received as a consequence of the WFF policy had made a contribution to their family's whānau ora. For some whānau, this was because the extra income alleviated the financial stress of trying to pay bills from week-to-week. For others,

however, the additional income gave many whānau choices, providing them with opportunities to participate in a range of activities that contributed to their whānau 'connectedness'.

Whānau connectedness, the ability to do things together as a whānau and support wider whānau functions (such as tangihanga and hui), was facilitated through families having access to additional household income. Taiapa (1998) has noted that whānau values, whānau obligations and the responsibilities associated with whānaungatanga may place a heavy financial burden on whānau, yet this connectedness is crucial for the achievement of whānau ora for many of the whānau we interviewed.

Working for Families support has clearly become a key factor in low-to-middle-income Māori whānau wellbeing. WFF contributes significantly to these families surviving on both a day-to-day and longer-term basis. The reliance by Māori whānau on WFF support, and the reasons for that reliance, must be afforded immediate consideration by policymakers and politicians as the economic recession, first noted in June 2008 (Kiro et al. 2010), continues to linger. On the basis of previous evidence (Blakely & McLeod 2009), we know that the effects of this recession are likely to be felt most profoundly, and experienced more acutely, by Māori than by any other population group in New Zealand. And yet, at the same time, the government is having to consider the purpose of welfare policy, the future sustainability of our welfare system and options for reducing welfare spending (Welfare Working Group 2010). Any review of New Zealand's welfare policy must take into account the reliance many working whānau now have on their WFF support. This support provides more than a means of getting by between pay cheques for some of our most vulnerable families; it is also a means, for some, of facilitating whānau ora, of achieving a sense of whānau wellbeing, and for others, is a crucial element in their very survival.

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Note

1 Nelson/Marlborough are not represented in this data as we sought to include only those households who were part of the THNR survey prior to the introduction of WFF and this region joined the survey after the policy was introduced.

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