



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF NEW ZEALAND

TE KAUNIHERA WAHINE O AOTEAROA

15 June 2012

S12.23

Submission to the Ministry of Education on Development of a New Intensive Wrap-around Special Education Service and Consultation on the Future role of Residential Special Schools

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 51 nationally organised societies and national members. It has 22 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 150 other societies as well as individual members. NCWNZ's function is to represent and promote the interests of New Zealand women through research, discussion and action. This submission has been prepared by the NCWNZ Education Standing Committee and in the short time available, interested members of NCWNZ.

Education, especially for women and those with special needs, has been one of the major concerns of NCWNZ since the Council's inception in 1896. A number of NCWNZ members have children with special needs and others have been involved as teachers and specialists in special education.

Several members have been involved in some way with the Salisbury School in Nelson. This submission relates to the possible closing of Residential Special Schools especially the residential aspect of Salisbury School.

Question 1: Is there a continuing need for Residential Special Schools within the new proposed service?

Salisbury School is the only school in New Zealand providing residential care for post primary girls with intellectual and/or multi impairments who continue to fail to achieve in their home environment. It is a last resort for girls for whom all other means of support have failed.

"It is well documented that girls and women with disabilities face a triple jeopardy for poverty, unemployment, and poor long-term livelihood because of their marginalised position of gender, living in poverty and disability status." (Simpson, 2010).

This group of girls has undergone multi assessments because of their complex diagnoses and challenging behaviours. However these assessments conducted by a range of professionals have not in the majority of cases resulted in successful educational placement in mainstream schools. In the past it has become very evident that the supportive environment where they are able to access a curriculum which has been sufficiently and successfully adapted to fit their very individual learning needs has not been found. That is until they have been accepted into a residential setting such as Salisbury School.

At Salisbury, girls live and learn in a tailored environment and are supported to integrate with the community. From members' comments it seems the success rate is high.

We suggest the wrap-around model has not been tested enough on girls aged 12-18.

Research by Londonⁱ has proven that this cohort of teen-age girls with special needs is particularly vulnerable. They generally require a residential setting to bring about the change needed to enable them to participate in a community where they are safe from physical, sexual and emotional harm.

Question 2: If so, what role should Residential Special Schools play?

Salisbury School provides residential care and education, adapted to individual needs for girls whose needs have not been met in their home and mainstream schools situation. It is a last resort when support in the home and school environment has not succeeded. Without Salisbury School, the most vulnerable of teenage girls will never learn how to cope in the world alone.ⁱⁱ

Salisbury runs an Outreach programme which is working well, in accessing those for whom residential care is required. We note isolated rural families may not have access to wrap-around services. Even girls in families who had accessed all available help, found the solution for the family and the girl required at Salisbury School.

Also as noted under Question 1 there have been no trials to assess the workability of the wrap-round model for girls of the cohort referred to in Salisbury School. There is also concern that girls who are assessed and need a high level of help may not meet the local school's criteria. Therefore the local school will be unable to claim this financial assistance, and this could adversely impact on teachers in the mainstream schools. The one to suffer would be the girl in need.

ⁱ London, P. 2011. Us and Them. Victoria University of Wellington

ⁱⁱ London says is that young women with disabilities are amongst one of the most marginalised populations world wide. (London, 2012).

Living on-site means that there is a 24/7 opportunity within a closely supervised specialized environment to practise independent living skills on a daily basis where expectations are consistent, communication skills reinforced with a goal to achieve a satisfactory harmonious environment. Every action has the potential to be a learning experience. This ensures that gains made are sustained when the girls transition back to their own communities, including what they need to live independently or go flatting.

Question 3: What other things do we need to consider as we develop the new service model?

There is a need to consider that the needs of a post-primary girl with intellectual impairment are very different from that of a primary school girl. We get the impression that the wrap-around model for post-primary girls is still at the experimental stage.

Because of their problems, isolation within their peer group at a large mainstream school is likely to hamper social development and confidence. Mainstream schools do not have the facilities/time/experience to support girls with problems including mental impairment in spite of their best efforts. For some girls residential care is their salvation.

The major issue appears to be that there has been no research which looks at the wrap-around model apart from some concentration on primary aged students with severe and challenging behaviours.ⁱⁱⁱ

Salisbury's cohort consists of female students in a secondary setting. These girls have not been able to successfully access a curriculum in the past in a variety of mainstream settings. Before such a residential setting with specialized staff such as Salisbury is closed, research needs to focus on this group.

New Zealand has a Special Needs Education policy and system which is considered by many to be world class. The services are focused on the needs of children. What the Special Needs community identifies as right for itself should be heard and respected. What they say is all about inclusion for better outcomes.

"Inclusion is not about placing all disabled students and students with special educational needs in either mainstream schools or special schools, ignoring differences and treating all students the same. It is about adequate provision to meet each pupil's needs with the most appropriate provision, to enable each student to access fully education and the life of her school." (Michael Fullan, 2006).^{iv}

ⁱⁱⁱ Mitchell, D. 2012. *Joined Up*. University of Canterbury. Mitchell says in his research that the evidence around the wrap around model is "rather mixed" (p.8.).

^{iv} *Leading in a Culture of Change* Michael Fullan 2006

There is limited research on special needs children being carried out in New Zealand. Research, data collection and reporting on the needs and services should be valued and used as the basis for review and for building capacity of the school and parent community.

The mainstream setting does not suit all students. Residential Special Schools play a valuable and important role by providing students a safe environment with the kind of specialist help and support they need to learn, achieve and reach their potential in life to become functioning members of society.

Overall, a balanced model of provision / retention of special schools, facilities and units with well-resourced mainstreaming should be the aim.

Elizabeth Bang

Rae Duff

National President

Convener Education Standing Committee