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SPRE conference

The second biennial Social Policy, Research and Evaluation (SPRE) Conference was held in Wellington on 25 and 26 November 2004.

Hosted by the Ministry of Social Development, it provided real insights into 'what works' both in policy and in practice. Keynote speakers included Professor Mason Durie, Cindy Blackstock, Helen Roberts, Raymond Torres, Congressman Faleomavaega Eni Hunkin and Professor Johan Mackenbach. They were complemented by more than 100 papers presented by New Zealand researchers in the parallel sessions.

"I enjoyed a wonderful two days being challenged, inspired, motivated and occasionally moved. I think the conference has again provided a fantastic opportunity to further strengthen our networks and learn from each other," said Ministry of Social Development Chief Executive Peter Hughes.

The conference was opened by the Prime Minister Helen Clark, who said the government was committed to improving the provision and uptake of policy-relevant social research. "Rigorous analysis and evaluation about what works will enable us to make better decisions about where we should target our investments. It will enable new programmes and interventions to be designed to lead to the best possible outcomes," she said.

Social Development and Employment Minister Steve Maharey said the conference was part of the government's drive to focus on good social policy. "We need to know what works. We need to communicate what works. We need to be committed to developing policies and programmes that really do deliver the right results, rather than doing what we guess might work. That's the only way we will be able to develop sustainable social policies that benefit New Zealand and New Zealanders."

Research, Science and Technology Minister Pete Hodgson said that, from his perspective, 'what works' meant social research and evaluation that was relevant, and that understood the complex links between the economic, social, environmental and cultural dimensions.

Conference papers can be accessed at <http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/events/strategic-social-policy/conference-04/>



*Prime Minister
Rt Hon Helen
Clark*



*Hon Steve
Maharey*



Ethnicity no proxy for class

Race and ethnicity are as much determinants of social outcomes as social class, Professor Mason Durie told the SPRE conference.

Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Māori) and Professor of Māori Research and Development at Massey University, Mason said recent debate about race-based policies in New Zealand had revealed a general lack of understanding about the objectives of policies, their application, and measures of effectiveness.

The strong relationship between ethnicity and adverse socio-economic circumstances had sometimes led to an assumption that one was a proxy measure for the other. "Being Māori, for example, is often seen as a synonym for being poor and being poor is sometimes seen as the distinguishing characteristic of Māori and Pacific peoples." But, while there was strong correlation between the two measures of ethnicity and socio-economic status, they did not measure the same phenomena. "Needs-based policies and policies of equity as between individuals have tended to regard ethnicity and race as significant only insofar as they might be subsumed under universal indicators such as social class, life expectancy and educational achievement. However, recent research has demonstrated that class is distinguishable from ethnicity," he said.

In education, for example, research indicated there was often a mismatch between the culture of the school and the ethnic cultures of the learners, with both teachers and learners making assumptions about 'normal' that implicitly excluded Māori. "Evidence therefore suggests that difference in the educational outcomes of Māori children cannot be explained entirely on family incomes or class – the centrality of ethnicity and culture to outcomes is a factor in its own right."

A second area of debate focused on affirmative action programmes based on race and ethnicity, such as entry schemes that allowed a limited number of Māori students to enter medical school without necessarily having the same academic profiles as other students. Such programmes were criticised on two grounds – first, that such students were allowed to graduate with lesser standards. "Clearly that view represents a gross distortion. While different criteria might be used to justify admission, once admitted, students undertake similar course work, sit the same examinations and meet the same qualifying standards." The second argument was that all students should be admitted on 'merit'. "Merit appears to mean that academic criteria



Professor Mason Durie

should be the sole determinant of admission. The need for a non-Māori student with high grades to forfeit a place to a Māori student with lower grades seems wrong to those who associate academic performance with academic right. However, successful educational outcomes depend on many factors apart from earlier academic achievement."

It was also important for educational institutions to contribute to society, in accordance with the public good statements in their charters. "It is both simplistic and short-sighted to define merit solely on the academic merits of individual students in isolation from other students or the institution's broader social goals. In that respect it may be perfectly fair to reject a student because too many others like him or her have already been enrolled at the expense of diversity and institutional goals for a better society." Taking account of race helped institutions achieve their mission of promoting academic advancement and diversity on campus, and to attend to long-term society needs.

It was misleading to develop policies and programmes that purported to be 'blind' to race and ethnicity. "The New Zealand reality is that an increasingly large number of people have an indigenous or ethnic orientation that underlies both personal and collective identity, provides pathways to participation in society, and largely influences the ways in which societal institutions and systems respond to their needs."

Mason's paper is at <http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/events/strategic-social-policy/conference-04/mason-durie.doc>

Advancing an evidence-informed culture

Professor Richard Bedford, chair of SPEaR, reflects on key challenges for improving the knowledge base.

Monitoring the impact of research and evaluation on social policy will be an “interesting challenge” for SPEaR, says the committee’s new chairman, Professor Richard Bedford.

The government has asked SPEaR to report annually on how improving the knowledge base has had an impact on social policy. “The government wants evidence that research and evaluation flows on to better policy and therefore to better outcomes in the long term.

“It’s an interesting challenge, given the time it takes for the effects of new knowledge to work through into policy. We need to be careful not to set in train unreasonable expectations that new knowledge can impact quickly on policy,” Richard said.

One way to assist would be for departments to consciously note the connections between research and evaluation studies and their formulation of policy. This had been encouraged in recent years as a result of ongoing interaction between external researchers and people within government agencies.

An example was the shift in thinking about the support systems families would need, given an ageing population and sustained low fertility. “There’s a similar shift in terms of immigration policy, where intensive contact between government, policy makers and researchers at annual workshops has encouraged a

stronger focus on settlement outcomes,” he said.

“There is a very open discussion in New Zealand between policy analysts, researchers in government departments and universities and Ministers of the Crown, and that’s a healthy situation. The open system of communication may disguise the impact of a particular research finding. We share a lot of information and building knowledge is iterative and ongoing.”

An example was a new population website (www.population.govt.nz) The result, after much inter-departmental discussion and collaboration, was a checklist of demographic concepts and factors for policy makers to take into account. It would be difficult to show in a straightforward way how such improvements in knowledge would impact on policy. “But SPEaR has to engage with that. It will be a good challenge. If we don’t demonstrate research has an impact, it will be hard to argue for sustained funding. SPEaR is about making sure new information and knowledge is impacting on policy in a coherent way.”

SPEaR was also making progress in improving best practice in research and evaluation. “It’s critically important to ensure consistency in practice in government and private research. Research in the social arena is complex and there are ethical considerations. We have to have well thought out procedures.



Professor Richard Bedford

There are also multi-cultural dimensions. We must be sensitive to how other cultures view certain types of questions or ways of seeking information from them. The protocols for seeking information from Māori or Pasifika people are different from those used in Pākehā research – there is a different sense of ownership of knowledge. So we need to adopt good practice in approaching people for information.”

Richard said the work of the recently established Building Research Capability in the Social Sciences (BRCSS) Net would provide a ‘front door’ for academic social research, in the same way as SPEaR provided the first coordinated approach to social research in the government sector. Another challenge was data saving and sharing, and ensuring better use of data, particularly when it was funded by government. “It’s a key concern – how to make more of the information that’s gathered available for wider use.”



Valuing the lived experience

Cindy Blackstock, of the Gitskan First Nations people of Canada, would like the 'lived experience' of her people to be given more weight as a source of research evidence.

Chief executive of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (FNCFCSC), Cindy was in New Zealand as a keynote speaker at the Social Policy, Research and Evaluation conference. She described the multiple negative effects of colonisation on First Nations families, including the forced assimilation of children into mainstream society by removing them from their families and placing them in residential schools. Since then, community-based First Nations child and family service agencies have been developed to stem the disproportionate number of children being placed in non-aboriginal foster homes. However, despite the agencies' success, Cindy says they are limited by systemic under-funding, the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge in social work, and having to work within Euro-western legislation.

Cindy told the *Bulletin* her organisation's role was to provide resources indigenous communities could draw from to implement their own best solutions. It publishes a research journal, *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, which provides a forum for sharing knowledge that respects indigenous culture and indigenous knowledge, and an annotated database of articles. In terms of research and evaluation, Cindy says communities are best placed to do their own research. "That's where the most important questions are and they are in best position to answer them," Cindy says.

She would like more weight given to people's lived experience. "Research is often based on getting new answers and new knowledge. But our ancestors raised children, and what shapes our children is not new. What we find in research is what aboriginal people have been saying. It provides evidence in a form the government is willing to hear. But I would like the government to listen to information provided on the basis of lived experiences – to value that experience not just when it is validated by quantitative research."

FNCFCSC does take part in national research projects such as a 1998 study of the incidence of child abuse and neglect Canada, in which FNCFCSC was involved in the secondary analysis of data on aboriginal children. The study found that neglect was the main reason for placing aboriginal children into care. Cindy said neglect implied parents were unwilling or unable to meet the needs of the child, and assumes parents

have influence over the risk factors. "So we controlled for certain variables – poverty, inadequate housing, and substance misuse. We found that if you controlled for those three factors, there was no over-representation of aboriginal children in the child welfare system. That is, if those did not exist at disproportionate rates, there



Cindy Blackstock speaking at the SPRE conference

would be no over-representation of aboriginal children in child welfare care – it would be at the same level as other children." She said poverty and poor housing were systemic factors over which families had little influence. And while substance misuse involved personal choice, there was also a systemic issue of limited access to services for First Nations people compared with other Canadians. "There is a disconnection between the services we provide and the actual drivers of child poverty. Far too often we focus on the relationship between child and family, without dealing with the societal factors that put them at risk. As social work professionals, we must be deal with the structural issues that impact on child wellbeing as much as we support families to deal with their personal relationships."

The *First Peoples Child and Family Review* is at www.fncfcs.com Cindy's keynote address is at <http://www.msd.govt.nz/events/conferences/social-policy-04/papers-presentations/keynote-blackstock.html>



Building a social science research network

Social science research is in a "healthy state" but a lot more needs to be done to meet future challenges, says Professor Paul Spoonley, acting director of the new social sciences research network, BRCSS Net.

BRCSS Net, funded by the Tertiary Education Commission through the Government's \$8 million Building Research Capability in the Social Sciences (BRCSS) programme, comprises a nine-person Board of Management and a Research Council of 40 senior researchers from throughout New Zealand, mostly from tertiary education institutions.

Paul said there was a "real commitment" from those in the sector to the collaborative, networking process that underpinned BRCSS. "The feeling and the commitment is very strong. It brings us together in new and exciting ways."

He said the sector was in a healthier state now than it had been in a long time. "The number of jobs available to social science researchers has increased noticeably since the 1990s, and social science research is seen as contributing to the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of the country," he said.

"The training of social science researchers is a priority now, and tertiary institutions are keen to contribute to the supply of qualified researchers. The number of postgraduates has increased and there are some very good postgraduate courses."

However, there were also some problems. "There are gaps in methodology, such as in evaluation, and there's a need for a better alignment of the training of researchers with the needs of those employing them," Paul says.

"There are also gaps in terms of the next generation of senior researchers. The nature of this country in the late eighties and the nineties means we have an age gap. We've got good senior and junior researchers but it's not clear who will provide the next generation of research managers and leaders.

"There are also issues relating to Māori, Pasifika peoples and new settler researchers. It is very important to train and improve the skills of social science researchers from these communities."

The BRCSS Net brings together 36 existing funded projects. The work is grouped into four themes: new

wealth creation and distribution systems; social justice and development; transmission of wealth and knowledge in the context of demographic change; and sustainability of diverse households, communities and settlements.

"We've got \$250,000 a year to seed new research and new research teams," Paul said. "We'll be holding meetings and workshops

on the individual themes that will bring all those researchers interested in that theme together, including private sector researchers who are outside the tertiary education sector. Then we will provide seeding funding for the teams that will emerge from those discussions. The result will be a more obvious, horizontal layer than now – a layer that runs across institutions, across disciplines and across the country. The funding will be seed funding only – the teams will need to apply elsewhere for further funding."

BRCSS Net would also build the sector's research capability by supporting postgraduate, postdoctorate and emerging researchers through workshops, internships and placements, postdoctoral fellowships, mentoring schemes, regional seminars and distinguished visitor fellowships.

The BRCSS Net will develop a high-tech video conferencing facility in each of its constituent universities to support its work, and it will conduct a survey of social science research every two years to assess the state of the sector. It is also committed to data sharing and working strategically with SPEaR.



Professor Paul Spoonley at the SPRE conference

The network is looking to appoint a director. The position is at professorial level and based at Massey University's Wellington campus. For details, email p.spoonley@massey.ac.nz or go to www.BRCSS.net

Ensuring Asian health and wellbeing

The challenge of maintaining the 'healthy immigrant' effect was one of a number of themes emerging from the recent conference on Asian Health and Wellbeing: Now and Into the Future, says organiser Dr Samson Tse.

The conference brought together experts from a variety of disciplines – medical and health sciences, social services, cultural studies, social sciences, and outcome evaluation – to discuss recent advances in Asian health.

Samson said an important theme was the need to adopt a positive approach to Asian health and wellbeing issues. "On the whole, the migrant population has relatively better health status than the host population because immigrants are screened before being allowed to come here.

"Overseas research shows that in about 10 to 20 years the migrant population's health status converges with the host population. But we shouldn't wait till that happens – the challenge is how to maintain the initial levels of health and wellbeing."

Another aspect was to find out the resiliency factors and coping strategies used by those who coped successfully with the stresses and challenges of being new immigrants, such as coping with a new language, new job, and new cultural situations.

"For example, are strong family relationships a protective factor? What we learn can also be useful for other population groups in New Zealand?" Samson said.

The keynote speakers provided an international perspective on health and wellbeing issues affecting

Asian communities. The speakers included Professor Yang Ke from Peking University, who talked of the cancer problem in China, and Professor Robyn Norton from the University of Sydney, who discussed road injury in the South East Asian region.

Professor Kam Bhui, from the University of London, discussed research that showed a link between discrimination and poor mental health and wellbeing – an area in which more work is needed in New Zealand, Samson said.

"...in about 10 to 20 years the migrant population's health status converges with the host population...the challenge is how to maintain the initial levels of health and wellbeing"

Other keynote speakers included Dr Albert Persaud, a senior adviser in the Department of Health in London, who discussed the issue of how to make policy work, and Mr Shun Au, of the Chinese Mental Health Association in London, who talked about alternative healing methods.



Dr Samson Tse (right) is honoured at the conference by Hon Hishey Lachungpa, Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Government of Sikkim in India (centre) and Jannyang Dorjee, coordinator, Government of Sikkim

The conference was organised by the Centre of Asian Health Research and Evaluation Centre of the University of Auckland's Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences and was sponsored by the SPEaR Linkages programme. "We are extremely grateful for the sponsorship from SPEaR. The conference provided the opportunity for practitioners, researchers, policy makers and funders in government and private sectors to exchange and strengthen the knowledge base in Asian health issues. This will increase the capacity of communities and services to face the challenges posed by future changes in the Asia Pacific region," he said.

For more information, contact s.tse@auckland.ac.nz



Need for collective evaluation measures

It is important for evaluators to include collective as well as individual measures when considering what constitutes a good outcome, says Professor Mason Durie.

"We are better at devising indicators that reflect the status of the individual in society but we are not as good with indicators that reflect the collective outcomes, whether they are for families or communities or populations such as Māori, Pasifika peoples or Asians," Mason, Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Māori) and Professor of Māori Research and Development at Massey University, told the *Bulletin*.

"A key issue in evaluation is to make sure when we are talking about outcomes whether we are employing the right measures."

It was important not to measure the position of individuals in society and regard that as an adequate measure of society as a whole without also measuring groups in society. "Sometimes we just draw the individual statistics together and think we have got a picture." He said there were some outcome indicators that were universal. "But there are other indicators which are population specific. If you are looking at best outcomes, you need to use a combination of universal and population-specific outcomes rather than expecting everyone to be accommodated in the universal. Research does not always do that now."

Mason has been involved in research developing instruments to measure best outcomes in mental health for Māori. "When we were developing them, we heard that most people tended to measure mental health by the presence or absence of symptoms – for example, a good outcome would be if a person's depression was gone, or they no longer had delusions." But a Māori perspective of health includes spiritual, intellectual and emotional, physical and family connections – and a good outcome would have gains in those four areas, thus reflecting a Māori world view in the outcome measure. Most mental health outcomes measured only intellectual or emotional gains, and paid little attention to gains in spiritual or physical health. "Yet they are critical to the notion of good outcomes for Māori."

Mason was under no illusion as to the difficulties involved in outcome measurement. "You have to wait a

long time for outcomes, and there are a lot of variables that affect an outcome. So there are problems in getting outcome measures to measure the efficacy of a particular programme. But we can do better than we are doing. We tend to measure efficacy on volumes –

the number of passes in NCEA, or the number of people treated in health. But outcome measures need to reflect not only gains in a particular sectoral sense but gains that reflect the aspirations people have for their own society.

"In education, for example, a student may go through the education process and come out with knowledge that will equip them to participate in society generally, but it may fail to equip them to participate in their own specific society,

be it Māori, Pasifika or Asian. In education, a process that does not recognise what would be needed for that person's particular life, that simply assumed everyone was the same, falls short of reaching a good outcome."

With respect to the ethics of best practice in researching ethnic groups, Mason said the same principles applied there as for any social research. "That is, you have people's buy in and active participation, not their acquiescence."

He said research must be linked to the world views, priorities and aspirations of ethnic groups, so research did not plunder but helped to build. "But that's true of all good research in a community. You would expect to establish good links and be able to communicate and get buy in." Good research involved people early in the design and it was important to provide feedback. "Don't take the respondents for granted. You have an obligation to let them know the results of research and to show how they might benefit from the results directly or indirectly over time."

Mason said in one sense the notions were ethnic specific but they also applied to all research. "A lot of Māori values and notions about research have helped articulate best practice for research. People say we shouldn't only do that for Māori. We should do it for all research."



Professor Mason Durie



SPEaR developing best practice guidelines

Developing best practice guidelines to support quality research and evaluation is a key area of work for the Social Policy Evaluation and Research (SPEaR) committee.

Raewyn Good, Principal Analyst – SPEaR, outlined progress at the recent Social Policy, Research and Evaluation conference in Wellington.

“First, it must be acknowledged that there is scope to lift the game and ensure that the range of skills and expertise available in the community of practice is actually utilised throughout the research and evaluation process,” Raewyn said.

She emphasised that the development process was an iterative process, and sought to engage people with particular interests and expertise.

The process began in 2002 with four strands of work identified for attention: R&E involving Māori, R&E involving Pasifika, contracting, and applying ethics. Initial work involved discussions with a range of people and an extensive literature search and analysis.

This work was drawn together into a series of papers which formed the background to a series of workshops held in May 2004 (see www.spear.govt.nz for these papers).

The workshop participants came up with a number of recommendations for SPEaR to consider and these were reported in Raewyn’s presentation (see <http://www.msd.govt.nz/events/conferences/social-policy-04/papers-presentations/56.html> slides 13-16).

SPEaR has set up a working party sub-committee to oversee the next phases of development. At present, a draft list of guiding principles has been identified, namely: respect, integrity, responsiveness, competency and reciprocity.

Descriptors are currently being drafted, and these will be tested in several agencies to see how the theory applies in practice.

The proposed structure for the guidelines at present is to have three linked parts – generic descriptors (the principles described), applied descriptors (the principles applied to the four work areas outlined above) and applied examples (case studies illustrating the application of the principles in real-world examples).

People are invited to participate in the process of development. “They may wish to send in examples of contract clauses they have negotiated (such as intellectual property, publication arrangements, or data sharing/ownership arrangements), and send in



case study material – both good and not so good,” Raewyn said.

Contracting of particular expertise is part of the work plan for 2005 and, as material develops, it will be available via the SPEaR website so people can comment if they choose.

“Above all, we want people to engage. Something useful, not something on the shelf, is the goal,” Raewyn said.

For more information, go to www.spear.govt.nz

Health gets R&E feedback

Hui have played a significant role in the Ministry of Health's research and evaluation activity that supports one of its key population health strategies, He Korowai Oranga – the Māori Health Strategy.

Work on the Monitoring Framework and Strategic Research Agenda for He Korowai Oranga is carried out by a team led by Paula Searle, Manager, Strategic Projects, Māori Health Directorate.

The team has held focus group hui throughout New Zealand to discuss what Māori want in terms of monitoring and research around He Korowai Oranga.

"The key message from the more than 120 people attending the various hui was research 'done by us, not to us'," Paula said.

"Those taking part in the hui were highly knowledgeable about research and monitoring issues. The hui were very informative and well worth it and we have a clear understanding of what whānau, hapu and iwi would like to see in the Ministry's Māori health strategic research agenda and monitoring framework for He Korowai Oranga," Paula said.

There were some valuable insights to come out of the hui that are applicable to other agencies undertaking research that involved Māori.

"For example, those attending wanted to see the results of the research being used to inform policy decisions, but most importantly the results being used to improve whānau health and wellbeing."

Other elements participants thought were important for research were:

- the research should reflect what happens locally, not just nationally – it is important that the grass roots are reflected
- it must be analysed using the Treaty of Waitangi and

Māori models, e.g. Te Whare Tapa Wha and Puao-te-ata-tu

- Māori researchers would make a difference
- the research must be intersectoral, incorporating housing, education and employment sectors, and so on, because health is affected by all these factors
- the information needs to be collected about individuals and groups
- there need to be a better balance between qualitative and quantitative research with more of a focus on the former.

"The challenge for the Ministry of Health is doing research and evaluation that provides meaningful information so that we can develop more effective service delivery for Māori and improve health and disability outcomes for Māori," Paula says.

All substantive issues from the hui, the submissions, the literature review, and discussions with other government agencies, have been considered and are now being integrated within the working papers that establish the monitoring framework.

Likewise the hui generated a lot of discussion about Māori health research in general and the Strategic Research Agenda, which will be released in 2005.



Paula Searle

New head for Youth Development Ministry



Dr Alison Taylor has been appointed General Manager – Ministry of Youth Development. Alison has an extensive background in the health sector and has been Chief Executive of

the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand for the past six years. In this capacity Alison led a team of 35 staff throughout New Zealand providing services, advocacy and policy advice on issues for mental health consumers. Alison took up her new role on 6 December, 2004.

Read, explore, submit – SPEaR's new online portal

The new-look SPEaR website, operating since October, has features to make the practical business of connecting research and evaluation with social policy easier.

A speciality of the site is that it lets people submit and download a range of current information. It now has submission forms for news, upcoming events, employment opportunities and sector contacts online for the social research and evaluation community.

A key function is an abstracts 'library' designed to identify and make available published social policy research and evaluation.

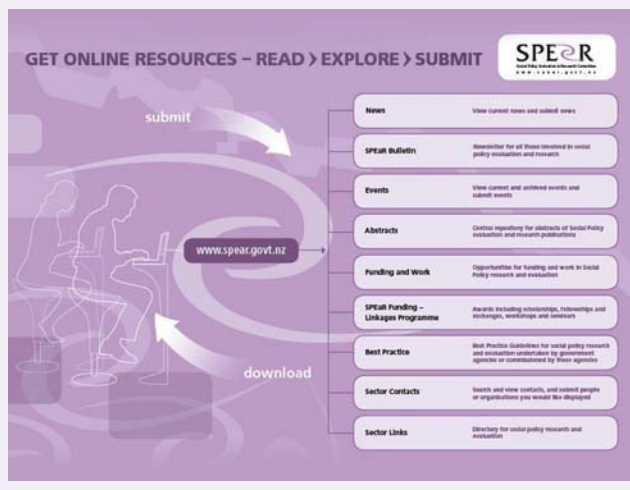
"This area is like a specialist online library for the research and evaluation community. Now we need people to upload completed research and evaluation abstracts so the library becomes 'full of books'.

"Our aim is that the site becomes a first port of call for checking what research and evaluation has been done before starting new work," said Paul Honeybone, Project Manager for SPEaR.

At the SPRE Conference in late November, SPEaR, as a major sponsor, promoted the site and is encouraging all practitioners to use this portal.

"We have built the virtual library, and now we need the users to make it serve its purpose by submitting and downloading information," Paul said.

See www.spear.govt.nz For assistance contact paul.honeybone001@msd.govt.nz



Data sharing

The SPEaR working party charged with advancing a cross-sectoral and cross-agency approach to social science data saving and sharing is developing three main strands of activity.

The group, comprising representatives from government agencies, universities and the private research sector, is first of all looking at international policies, protocols and practice for saving and sharing social data, and how these can be translated to the New Zealand situation. Secondly, it is looking at coordinated archival facilities for the tertiary education sector, where a lot of social research data is generated. Its third strand of work involves advancing new approaches for government departments to utilise and save data better in the social agencies where research is conducted.

Eric Pyle, Director, Environmental and Social Development at the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology and a member of the data saving and sharing working party, said Statistics New Zealand was developing a data archive of the most important statistics produced by government (Tier 1), and that the working party was looking at the issues related to saving and sharing other data.

He said 'next generation' internet capability meant it would soon be possible to shift large data sets easily. "That raises issues of ensuring there is compatibility in terms of standards both for the data and for the metadata – that is, information about the data, similar to the abstract to a paper, so you can see if you want to read it," he said.

"Getting access to different data sets and being able to link and match data in ways that are not possible at the moment means we'll be able to improve our practice. Just as sharing data in the physical sciences has resulted in new insights into the way ecosystems, for example, function, so it will generate new knowledge in the social sciences. It will also mean better use of existing data, which means better value for the money spent on data collection. Improved data saving and sharing practices improves the utilisation of the knowledge base. It's all part of information technology coming of age and helping us record and create connected understanding for social improvements."

For more information, go to www.spear.govt.nz

Risks, protection and outcomes

Clinical psychologist Narelle Dawson is completing doctoral research which evaluates the risks, protective factors and outcomes for young New Zealanders who have applied for the Independent Youth Benefit (IYB).

A SPEaR scholarship helped fund the research, which is thought to be a first that focuses on outcomes for this group of young people. "No one has ever collected longitudinal data in order to assess the outcomes for youth who apply for financial assistance due to family breakdown," Narelle said.

The research includes four separate studies. The first is a snapshot of the 2,029 16–18 year olds in Waikato who applied for the IYB between 1995 and 2001. The study identifies adverse life and social risk factors across the cohort. The second study is a retrospective file audit of IYB applicants which analyses risk and resiliency factors that contributed to adolescent suicide and suicide survival. The file records of six deceased IYB applicants are scrutinised against 36 other young applicants whose backgrounds were closely matched to the deceased, but who survived. Narelle said her analysis found seven salient factors that discriminated those who died by suicide from the control group. One factor was that none of the six deceased knew who their fathers were. "That has implications for young Māori in particular, as genealogy is a huge part of their identity. I'll be looking at the psychological implications for indigenous youth, especially where they are not told the name of their father."

The third study comprises recent interviews with a

group of 200 young people who had applied for the IYB between 1995 and 2001. The quantitative data is categorised into four groups – those who were granted the IYB and attempted suicide; those who were declined the IYB and attempted suicide; those who were granted the IYB and did not attempt suicide; and those who were declined the IYB and did not attempt suicide. "I have also recorded qualitative data from the interviews which will outline both the gaps and the resources which, from the point of view of those interviewed, has been influential in developing either positive or negative life outcomes. We hear the voice of the young people who used the system – what did and did not work for them, and what harmed them and what helped them survive."

The final study will assess 'cynical distrust levels' of 200 adults who were former IYB applicants compared with 330 high school students, to test the hypothesis that those attempting suicide have elevated levels of depression and hostility towards others. The thesis will conclude with recommendations for policy advisers, case managers, schools, parents and caregivers.



Narelle Dawson



Fono puts focus on Pasifika R&E

More than 250 Pacific researchers, evaluators, service providers, central and local government people and associated colleagues attended the first Pacific Research & Evaluation Series of Symposia and Fono held in Lower Hutt as part of the lead-up to the Social Policy, Research & Evaluation conference 'What Works'. Two SPRE conference keynote speakers gave presentations – United States Congressman Faleomavaega Eni Hunkin and Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director, First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada. Various groups and sectors held symposia on the first day, including Health, Local Government, Samoan Ministers Theological Symposia and Education, along with cultural caucuses such as

Tokelau, Niue, Cook Islands, Tonga, Samoa. Wainuiomata Marae hosted the Pacific Indigenous Knowledge symposium on the first evening. Plenary presenters included Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi and Professor Gary Hook from Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiarangi, Whakatane; SPEaR; the Health Research Council (HRC); Taeaomanino (Porirua-based service provider); Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (MPIA) and the Family Centre. The event was sponsored by SPEaR, MPIA, the HRC and the Ministry of Health, and was hosted by the Family Centre. Taimalieutu Kiwi Tamasese led the organising team. A report is being prepared, and information will be on the SPEaR website (at www.spear.govt.nz) when this is available.

Poster competition develops valuable skills

Summarising a 20,000 word-plus thesis into a few hundred words and ensuring visual impact as well is no easy task, as winner of the CRESA-sponsored postgraduate poster competition, Sarah Gerritsen, is the first to acknowledge.

An MA student at Victoria University of Wellington, Sarah won first prize of \$1,500. Elena Stevens and Kirsten Keown, also Victoria University students, won second and third prizes respectively, each worth \$750.

Sarah's poster was based on her thesis for an MA (Applied) Social Science Research degree at Victoria University. The research is entitled "Children, food and poverty: Food insecurity among primary school students in the Wellington region" and is due February 2005. The project quantifies the number of hungry children in the region, records and compares the responses of schools to this issue and gathers principals' opinions on the link between poverty and food insecurity.

Sarah said the results of her research show that there is a small but significant number of children in the region who were estimated to be regularly hungry, and that food insecurity was strongly correlated with socio-economic status (measured using the school decile rating). Ten per cent of children in Decile 1 and 2 schools were estimated by their principals to be regularly hungry during the school day.

Sarah said the poster competition, held in conjunction with the SPRE conference, was a fantastic opportunity to share her research findings with policy makers and other researchers. "I feel very privileged to have won with such tough competition! It was very difficult to reduce the project down to the salient points and in that regard it was great experience for the real world where the ability to condense complex ideas is crucial to getting heard," she said.

"Thank you to CRESA for the generous prize. I recommend all postgraduates enter the competition next time as it is a great opportunity to get your work out there."

Elena's poster looked at problems in the psychological adaptation among Russian immigrants to New Zealand. She finished a BSc (Hons) in Psychology this year and plans to enrol in a PhD in Psychology next year. Kirsten has also just completed her BSc(Hons) in



Sarah Gerritsen with her prizewinning poster

Psychology. Her poster summarised her research investigating child molesters' offence-supportive beliefs.

For more information on Sarah's thesis, go to www.hungrykids.info

People in R&E

Louise Munro has recently joined the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology on secondment from the State Services Commission. The focus of her work is with the social science sector, linking with the wider science system.



This involves close working relationships with SPEaR, BRCS and science system agencies. She is also working on 'future watch' work within the Ministry, connecting this with agency interests in research capability and planning.