

Long Term Support in Schools and Early Childhood Services after February 2011

Shelley Dean, *Ministry of Education*

The Ministry of Education was challenged by the provision of long-term support. The Ministry needed to consider what this would look like, who needed to receive it and why. Additional costs and burdens needed to be considered on those already responding and supporting the education community through the ongoing effects of the earthquakes. Information is not extensive internationally or domestically on long term supports and there is little mention about the role teachers and schools have in providing support for children young people and their families. The Ministry of Education had already considered and put in place supports and interventions, but were hearing, through schools and other agencies, various views on additional needs.

Internationally there is some information on programmes and some information about delivery – usually by experts outside of the school sector or using a “train the trainer” model within communities to respond to post traumatic stress in children and young people.

Teachers were important support to children and young people in September and again in February. Children and young people looked to them with each aftershock. Teachers needed to manage their own responses and reactions in order to support the children in their care. Teachers also needed to provide appropriate responses and answers to challenging earthquake related questions. The February earthquakes added further complexity, stress and challenge as it resulted in combined classes, new students or children in multi-aged classes, learning hubs, new classroom school settings, limited teaching times where the different schools shared sites, crowded classrooms, shortened days. For some teachers this meant their personal routines changed as they were no longer able to go home at the same time, have meal times with their own family and travel times doubled.

The Victoria State University psychosocial department made contact with the ministry after the September Earthquake and began sharing their learnings from providing psychosocial

support after the Victoria Bush Fires in Australia. They told us how important it was to continue to provide support for teachers, and said that if they could turn back time, they would have provided more direct support to schools. This approach was also supported by the Joint Centre for Disaster Research who joined with us to extend the psychosocial response within schools in Christchurch.

To develop a long term strategy to support teachers we advertised through various education networks and surveyed teachers’ well-being needs in May 2011. The survey asked “what is your teaching position (management, early childhood, primary or secondary teacher, or other), where do you live, where do you work, what are your well-being needs, and what support do you need for yourself, and the children and students you teach”.

One hundred and ninety four responses were received, 36 % primary, 28 % secondary 24% management 10% other and 3 responses from the Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector.

As many ECE are privately run as business operations, many teachers were unaware of the survey and there was no established network to inform them. The Ministry was communicating through newsletters to

the education sector and there was some concern that early childhood teachers were not accessing information through their management structures, so Ministry staff began to set up network meetings with early childhood teachers to support ECE staff and to attract ECE teachers to those network meetings.

The survey was re-advertised for the ECE sector but only received six responses.

The survey indicated good coverage over the rest of the sector, and we had similar response rates from secondary, primary and management. What we found was that most teachers had not accessed previous well-being workshops, which was surprising for the Ministry. Most education sector managers had attended well-being workshops but it appeared that messages and resources had not visibly or physically filtered through to teaching staff. When we started to look at the responses, we initially thought that where teachers lived and where they worked would provide information on where to direct resource or support. When analysed, the data indicated that where teachers taught and lived had no effect on their perceived need for support. The survey indicated 15% had no needs. In some of the worst areas some teachers indicated that “we’re fine, we’re okay, whereas in other less affected areas

teachers stated concerns and fears about what was happening and the support they needed. There were no discernable geographic patterns to well-being.

The main well-being themes that came out of the survey indicated that teachers needed.

- Information about supporting families
- Information on children and student well-being
- Information to supporting their own well-being

Teachers shared their concerns about site-sharing, increased additional teaching demands and the differences provided by management in different schools relating to travel and leave provisions and general support for teaching staff

Teachers also provided us with ideas to support their well-being. Some ideas offered were:

- teacher-tips for children,
- tips on self-care, and sleeping
- classroom tips,
- manager support and consistency,
- and ideas to support optimism back in their lives,

To confirm what teachers were telling us we held four face-to-face focus group meetings to feedback to teachers the information from the surveys and to check that we had correctly listened to their voices.

We had planned meetings in June, but unfortunately in June there were another series of strong aftershocks and a number of schools closed down for 2 or 3 days, so only two of those meetings went ahead.

What teachers emphatically stated they didn't need.

Teachers stated they didn't want things that took up extra time and extra resources, and/or placed additional burdens in their daily lives.

What teachers stated they needed.

During the meetings teachers confirmed that they needed accessible, readily available information. Teachers suggested that information should be placed on the site that teachers access frequently for teaching resources – on Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI). On the site they wanted information on children's reactions and recovery, behaviour, self care and positive recovery stories and supports available to families.

This information enabled us to start to form a long term plan and to communicate this to the sector. The plan extended access to school wide positive behaviour, Triple P parenting programmes and resources for families, ready access to tips-sheets and across agency resources. With permission from the Mental Health Foundation we adopted the "5 ways to well-being" framework and visual resources already developed to support communities in Christchurch. This framework was first established by the UK Government's Foresight

Project on Mental Capital and Well-being who reviewed inter-disciplinary work to identify a set of evidence-based actions to improve well-being, which individuals would be encouraged to build into their daily lives: Connect, Be active, Take notice, Keep learning, and Give.

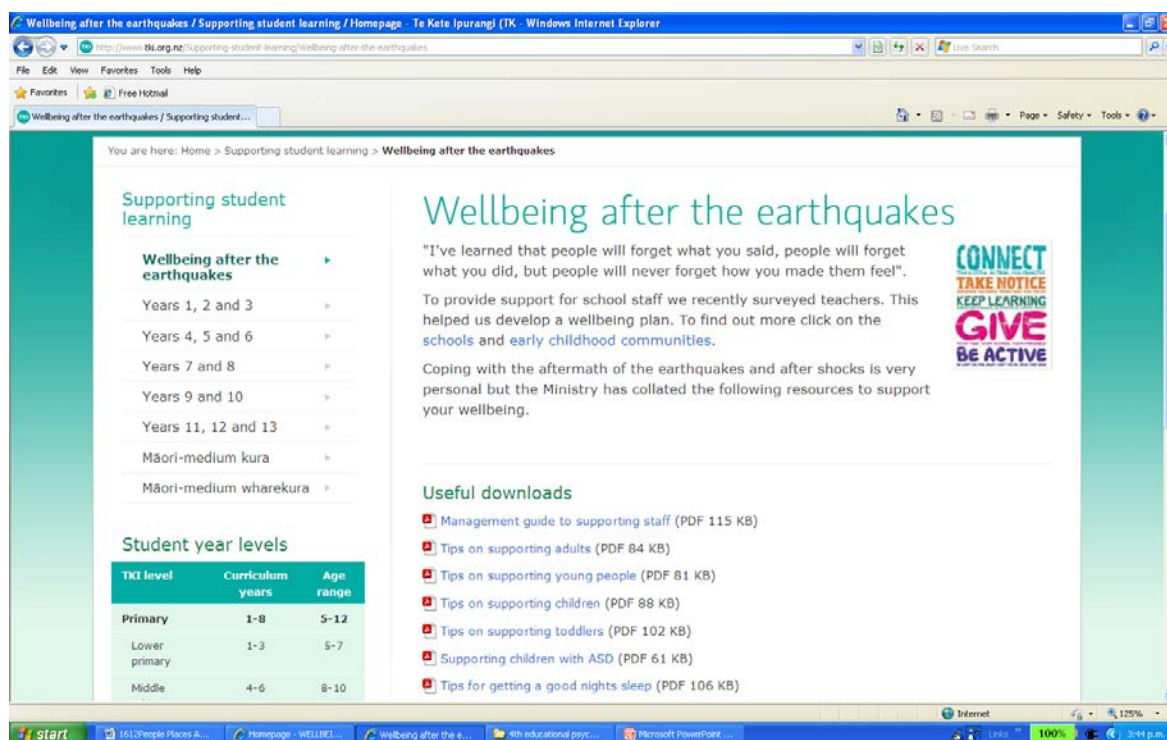
The initial site was quickly established and information about the on-going development of the site was advertised through sector meetings

Differing notions of appropriate support varied across agencies and within the sector which highlighted that specific responses needed to be further constructed in collaboration with the wider community (not just with teachers) and include members of all the Canterbury support systems. Further sector wide meetings were held with groups of people who were experiencing the needs of the education sector in different ways and whose notions of appropriate support and action varied. This collaborative approach lead by education brought together diverse groups and together constructed a tiered framework to support the healthy recovery of children and young people in schools. The TKI site has been redeveloped to reflect this. It continues to grow organically and collaboratively across the sectors www.well-being.tki.org.nz

Author Note

Shelley Dean is an Educational Psychologist at the Ministry of Education, shelley.dean@minedu.govt.nz

▼ **Figure 1:** The Initial Site



▼ **Figure 2:** The Redeveloped Site

